


BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA

Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy

Nitish Sengupta

PUBLICATIONS DIVISION



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Dedicated to the fond memory of
Sunanda, my wife who is no more

ABOUT THE SERIES

The object of this series is to record, for the present and future generations, the story of the struggles and achievements of the eminent sons and daughters of India who have been instrumental in our national renaissance and the attainment of independence. Except in a few cases, such authoritative biographies have not been available.

The biographies are planned as handy volumes written by knowledgeable people, giving a brief account, in simple words, of the life and activities of the eminent leaders and of their times. They are not intended either to be comprehensive studies or to replace the more elaborate biographies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In writing this biography within a short span of four months, I am indebted to many friends. First of all, I have to thank Shri Manish Gupta, Chief Secretary to the Government of West Bengal, who supplied me with invaluable materials from the Writers' Building library and Shri Arun Jaitley the then Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting for requesting me to undertake this task. I also owe a special debt of gratitude to Dr. (Mrs.) Reba Som, scholar, author and researcher who helped me sort out materials from the Nehru Memorial Museum library. I also acknowledge my gratitude to Shri O.P. Kejariwal, Director of the Nehru Memorial Museum, New Delhi and Shri Raotela, Incharge, Manuscript Reading Room, Nehru Memorial Museum, for giving me ample opportunity to consult the priceless Dr. B.C. Roy Papers which have been kept there very systematically.

I am thankful to Shri S.M. Bose, the Deputy Secretary to Chief Minister, West Bengal, during Dr. B.C. Roy's time. Shri R.N. Sengupta, Deputy Secretary (Home) in Dr. B.C. Roy's time and subsequently Chief Secretary, Smt. Sunanda Ray, Advocate and Sri Sumit Chakravarty, Editor, Main Stream for giving me the benefit of valuable materials orally.

I also thank many others who took the trouble to write to me in response to my newspaper advertisement seeking materials on Dr. B.C. Roy. I am thankful to my Personal Assistants, Shri Nirmaljit Singh, Shri A.K. Gupta, Shri T.C. Narula for taking copious notes and typing out my almost unreadable handwriting. Finally, I thank my wife, Dr. Sunanda Sengupta and my daughter Dr. Tamali Sengupta, for their support and understanding.

PREFACE

Dr. B.C. Roy has been one of the foremost national leaders of the 20th Century. A legendary physician of the country, a distinguished political leader, philanthropist, educationist and social worker, he became a top leader of the Congress during the middle period of our freedom movement and, after independence, became the Chief Minister of West Bengal in which capacity he transformed post-partition West Bengal from a problem state into one of the foremost states in the country. He also established himself as one of the foremost national leaders. I considered it a privilege when the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (Publications Division) requested me to write a biography of Dr. B.C. Roy in the “Builders of Modern India” series. I accepted the offer with gratitude and humility not only because of the great man that Dr. B.C. Roy was, but also because I had the opportunity to work under his shadow when I served as an Under Secretary in the Home Department of West Bengal Government during the years 1960-62. During these years I came to develop great respect and regard for him. I undertook this task in November 2000 and have been able to complete this work by March 2001 despite many preoccupations, political, domestic and others. I had an opportunity to go through the vast mass of Dr. B.C. Roy Papers kept in the archives of the Nehru Memorial Museum. I also found the two books on Dr. Roy by Shri Saroj Chakrabarty, almost of day-to-day account of Dr. Roy’s days as Chief Minister, of great use. Indeed he had done for Dr. Roy what Boswell did for Dr. Johnson K.P. Thomas’s Biography of Dr. Roy’s life before he became Chief Minister, West Bengal, and his early years as Chief Minister. This study has been for me a labour of love. I shall consider my labour amply rewarded if this biography invokes interest among our countrymen in the many splendoured personality that Dr. B.C. Roy, was, his wide range of interests and the large

number of institutions that he created in so many spheres, his great vision and his political and administrative acumen, his humane nature and concern for common people and, above all, the way he tried to solve very crucial problems in the nation's life, specially during the 15 years that he served as Chief Minister of West Bengal and as one of the foremost national leaders.

New Delhi

Dr. Nitish Sengupta

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

To the present generations of Indians, Dr B.C Roy is a near forgotten name. They have heard of him as a legendary physician of the past and as long time Chief Minister of West Bengal. But almost no one can recall him a front ranking national leader of the Congress for about four decades, as a avid institution builder and as multi dimensional person. I am thankful to Shri Arun Jaitley the then Information and Broadcasting Minister for requesting me to write a biography of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy for the Publication Division under Builders of Modern India series. I am also thankful to the readers who accepted the first edition of the Book so well. I hope the second edition will also be equally successful. I am thankful to Shri Manish Tewari, present Minister of I & B for agreeing to bring out the second edition of this Book. I also thank Publications Division for agreeing to reprint this Book.

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Early Life and Education

Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, the architect of modern West Bengal and one of the most distinguished leaders of 20th century India was born on 1 July, 1882 at Bankipore, Patna. His father, Prakash Chandra Roy hailed from a family that claimed descent from the legendary Maharaj Pratapditya of Jessore (now Bangladesh) who raised the banner of revolt against the Mughal Emperor, Akbar. He was defeated by Mughal Governor, Maharaja Man Singh of Marwar, during Emperor Jehangir's reign, and is still hailed in Bengali folklore as a hero.

Prakash had a struggling early life, but could complete his Entrance (School leaving) examination from Berhampore. At Berhampore he came under the influence of the Christian Missionaries and almost became a Christian. At the same time he also came into close contact with some members of the Brahmo Samaj. He liked the Vedantic form of prayer without any deity, the system of congregation and the Brahmo social practices, and was touched by lives of the Brahmo leaders. He, therefore, joined the Samaj and became an active member. Prakash Chandra could not complete his college education on account of poverty. He held various small jobs like Post Master in Burdwan and a supervisor in a printing press in Calcutta. In between, he could pass the B.A. examination and became an Excise Inspector under the Bengal Government. In 1886, he married Aghore Kamini, daughter of Bipin Chandra Basu, a beautiful and highly intelligent girl from all accounts, but illiterate at the time of marriage. Prakash Chandra taught her how to read and write Bengali. Soon she was not only educated, but also became a staunch Brahmo Samajist taking part in the Samaj's social, cultural and philanthropic activities despite facing considerable privation while her husband moved from one petty job to another. Prakash Chandra's memory titled "Aghore-Prakash" in English is an interesting account of their life together, the privations and accomplishments and their shared values and sacrifices. Aghore Kamini started higher education with her two eldest daughters and even spent a year in

Isobella Thoburn College, Lucknow, with them in order to learn English. In that process, she not only learnt English, but became a friend of Isobella Thoburn, the famous missionary lady, also acquired the skill of running a school for girls'. That skill was applied in starting a girls school at Bankipore, Patna years later with only her husband's savings and no financial help from any other quarter. That small school grew into one of the biggest Government schools, the present day Bankipore Girls High School. There is also another small school in Bankipore named after Aghore Kamini. Years later Bidhan as Chief Minister, West Bengal also set up a Government dispensary at the seaside resort of Digha and named it after his mother.

Prakash Chandra and Aghore Kamini had five children. The first two were girls. They were followed by three sons, Subodh, Sedhan and Bidhan. The name of Bidhan was reported to have been suggested by Keshab Chandra Sen, the leading light of the Brahmo Samaj at that time. On the occasion of the naming ceremony of Bidhan, his parents took the vow of celibacy placing their hands on the new born child—a vow kept religiously for the rest of their lives. Incidentally, Bidhan chose to remain a bachelor throughout his life. Bidhan's parents continued to live a highly disciplined life even when Prakash Chandra was promoted as Deputy Magistrate and Collector three years after Bidhan's birth which gave him both higher status and higher remuneration. They set an example of same living, social service and spiritualism in their family life. Prakash Chandra would invariably place his monthly salary in the prayer room and dedicate it to God seeking His blessings and guidance. Both of them were inspired by the spirit of service to people irrespective of caste and creed. Both disregarded religious conventions and formalities and simply served people. Once when there was a deadly cyclone in South East Bengal, killing many and rendering many others homeless, they responded to the Brahmo leader Keshab Sen's appeal for relief by selling Aghore Kamini's ornaments and sending the sale proceeds to Calcutta. They had a large circle of not only Brahmo but orthodox Hindu and Christian friends, including luminaries like Maharishi Debendranath, Rabindra Nath Tagore and Keshab Sen. They were keen travellers and, in their quest for spiritual peace, they visited many places in the Himalayas from Shimla to Darjeeling. There are many anecdotes of how they helped people in distress. But the strain of her work combining household duties with philanthropic and education work was telling on Aghore Kamini's death. She had an untimely death in 1896. Prakash Chandra had to

look after not only his five children but also the many orphans to whom his late wife had given shelter in the home. But he rose to the occasion, practising frugality and yet discharging all his children the best education he could afford. He sent all the three sons for higher professional education to Great Britain- Subodh to become a Barrister, Sadhan to become an Engineer, and Bidhan to become a Doctor. Prakash Chandra was to live till 1911, and died on 7th December of that year after seeing all his children well- settled in life including his favourite youngest child, Bidhan, who had by then returned from Great Britain with the unique distinction of having obtained degrees in both medicine and surgery. If ever there was a father who cast a profound indelible impression on a son, and the son had the greatest affection and admiration for his father, it was Prakash Chandra Roy and his son, Bidhan Chandra. As a child Bidhan was physically weak and carried this weakness till his youth; but he was sensitive and inherited from his parents the spirit of service to others. His constant companion was his brother, Sadhan, only two and a half- years senior to him. They studied and played together. Together they went to the village Pathshala (Primary School) where they learnt to read and write Bengali. Also, they went together to a Higher English School. Bidhan had a pet name in his childhood, 'Bhajan', which means devotional song, given to him by his grandmother. Sadhan, his elder brother's name means striving for a higher objective. On one occasion, when Bidhan heard his father muttering in the course of his daily prayer that he did not have Bhajan and less of Sadhan, the little child asked his father why he had said, so "when he had both Bhajan and Sadhan"¹. Bidhan moved with his father to various towns in Bihar (then a part of the Bengal Presidency) like Motihari and Mungher as and when he got transferred. As a school student, young Bidhan did not show any exceptional brilliance in his studies and not even took examinations or home work seriously. But he put in enough work to pass his examinations. As he grew older, he became fond of games. On one occasion when he was doing the drawing test on the last day of his Entrance examination, he got thoroughly bored and joined a football game in a playground next door leaving his drawing paper half done. Indeed, Bidhan's lack of interest in education at school contrasted sharply with the brilliant and serious student that he became after he joined medicine.

1. Thomas K.P. - Dr. B.C. Roy, West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee 1955, p. 59.

Bidhan's character was strongly influenced by his parents, their spiritualism, sense of discipline, strong sense of ethics and their spirit of service. It was from them that he got a strong aversion to the rituals, as also a strong sense of godliness and an attraction to Vedic hymns. Even in his active life in later years he could always keep a copy of the Gita, and one of Brahma Stotram, the Brahmo prayer book in his bedroom and would start his day glancing at them for a few minutes. Prakash Chandra used to tell his children to be self-reliant and full of humility and to rely on God's will. He impressed upon his children the mantra "God help those who help themselves". All this cast an indelible impression on young Bidhan's mind.

Surely, looking at his performance at school, no one could say that the morning shows the day. He was profoundly influenced by his parents' plain living and high thinking and their deep religious sense. As a child, Bidhan along with his brothers and sisters, joined the daily family prayers every morning of his own accord without any compulsion. He also realized very early in his life that his father, although he rose up to the position of a Deputy Magistrate and was posted as Superintendent of excise, was not rich. With the modest salary of government official, he could not afford a life of luxury. Thus Bidhan learned to share things with other family members. He lost his mother when he was only 14 years old. He recalled his mother's simple living and her life of service, and also how, as her end came nearer, she bore a lot of pain and agony cheerfully and how his father went to the prayer room and after prayer sat by her bedside when she breathed her last. After her death Bidhan and his brothers were looked after by Prakash Chandra who combined the role of the father and mother. Often the brothers had to do the household work under the supervision of their father. Prakash Chandra gave them the example of Mahatma Gandhi doing all his household work by himself and also asking his followers to do so. How attached Bidhan always remained to their memory is clear from the following anecdote. Once Bidhan, as Chief Minister, West Bengal, went to Patna to attend a conference. He took a railway saloon with him in order to return in the same evening. After his meetings he took time off to visit his childhood home. He came back to the saloon with a package wrapped up in newspaper. Looking visibly delighted he told his official "here is a sari that belonged to my mother which they have neatly preserved in an almirah all these years to return to any

one from my family who would visit. So you see what a wonderful bonus I have got visiting our old home.”²

Bidhan passed the Entrance examination from the Patna Collegiate School in 1897 and joined the Patna College. He passed the F.A. (First Art) Examination in 1899 and B.A. with Honours in Mathematics in 1901 from the same College.

A Medical Student

After Bidhan graduated from Patna, he had to take his own decision about what profession to opt for. Prakash Chandra had impressed upon his children that none of them should take up government service. Bidhan shared his father's dislike for law and applied simultaneously for admission to the Calcutta Medical College and the Bengal Engineering College. He had no special preference for either a medical career or engineering. It was sheer chance that the Medical College selected him earlier than the Engineering College. He could have gone for engineering if the admission card from the medical college had not come a few hours before the admission card from the Engineering College. On 1 June 1901, he went to Calcutta to join the Calcutta Medical College. Having been brought up in the moffusil atmosphere of Bankipur, Mungher and Motihari, Bidhan was somewhat nervous when he came to the metropolitan city. Naturally, he suffered from an inferiority complex in relation to his friends who had grown in Calcutta. Also, financially, he had to struggle, as his father could not afford to send him a handsome allowance every month. An inscription in the Dissection Hall at Calcutta Medical College attracted his attention on his very first day. "Whatever thy hands findeth to do, do it with thy might" These words continued to inspire him in his future career. Another inscription he came across on the walls of the YMCA Overtoun Hall, viz. "wrought by the power of prayer" also cast a profound influence on him. He shared a room with another student at the YMCA hostel next to the Presidency College. This room has only one window. Bidhan, a weakling from his childhood and sensitive to cold, wanted it to be closed so as to block the damp cold wind from getting in. The elder room-mate insisted on keeping it open. Inevitably, Bidhan got fever the next day. The elder fellow still kept the window open. Bidhan had several bouts of fever in succession, but became healthy thereafter.

He was no longer so sensitive to cold and dampness. In later years, Bidhan would sometimes narrate this story to argue that one could get rid of many ailments of body and mind by not being unduly sensitive to physical surroundings.

His father was sending a modest amount as monthly remittance during his first year in the medical college. But even this stopped from the second year onwards, when Prakash Chandra retired. Bidhan was lucky to get a scholarship which sustained him during the next four years of his medical studies. But still he did not have enough money to buy books and instruments. In fact, he could buy only one book for Rs. 5 during all the five years of his medical studies. He had to spend long hours copying notes from textbooks borrowed from his friends or from the college library. He never forgot those days even when fortune smiled on him. Later on, during his days as a medical practitioner, he would always help poor students with funds to purchase books. Apart from the scholarship, he also sustained himself by part-time work in the Medical College Hospital or in private nursing homes run by his teachers which gave enough opportunities for casual work. Working as a male nurse or as a student assistant during the holidays and winter months sometimes from 8 AM to 8 PM, he earned Rs 8 a day with which he supplemented his meagre resources. All this prepared him for his action-packed extremely busy day-to-day life afterwards.

Slowly but surely, he was shaping as a good student with interest in both surgery and medicine. He was popular with both his teachers and fellow students. Everyone was impressed with his seriousness of purpose and concentration in his work. Once when he was in the second year the Principal of the College, Gen. Bomfort went to the Anatomy Hall for inspection. While nearly every student tried to attract the Principal's attention, Bidhan did not stop work and went on with his dissection. The General stopped at his table and asked him, "Are you a good student?" Bidhan did not know what to answer. But the teacher, who was accompanying the Principal, told him about Bidhan's brilliance as a student. General Bomfort then told him, "We expect many things from you, Bidhan". This intuitive prediction from his Principal inspired Bidhan in his later years. Of all his Professors in Calcutta Medical

College, the one who influenced him most was Col. Lukis, who took over as the Principal after Bomfort. We cannot do better than reproducing Bidhan's own statement about his Principal:



As a Medical Student in London

I keep his portrait always in front of my seat in my consultation room, as he was the guide and inspirer of my life who developed the manhood in me, who made me honour myself, who roused the latent faculties in me and baptized me to a consecrated life of service to my country.³

Incidentally, Bidhan learned the principle of nationalism from this Englishman. Although, a personal friend of Viceroy Curzon, Lukis sympathized with India's national aspirations. He also enunciated for Bidhan a code of moral conduct in professional life which he never forgot - "A heart that never hardens; a temper that never tires; and a touch that never hurts." It was as a student in the medical college that Bidhan was profoundly inspired by the nationalist movement that had started in the wake of the partition of Bengal in 1905. Those were troubled times. The Indian National Congress after its first two decades of

3. Thomas, K.P. op cit, p. 49.

petitions, prayers and passing resolutions (1885-1905) was getting transformed after 1905 into an instrument of political movement. The city of Calcutta protested under the leadership of Surendra Nath Banerjee, against the partition of Bengal and militancy became the permanent focus of political unrest in the country. The cry for Swaraj from the nationalist trio - Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal reverberated throughout the land. A section of the nationalists turned to militancy and armed terrorism against the British rulers. Bidhan as a student in Calcutta could not but be influenced by this environment all around him and became a staunch nationalist. On one occasion, when Bidhan and one of his friends were returning to Calcutta from Burdwan and tried to get into a higher class railway compartment, an Anglo-Indian couple who had occupied the two benches refused to give them seating space. These two students had to physically fight the Anglo Indian bully to win the right to sit. Years later, recalling this incident Bidhan said, "We felt we had already won the struggle with the British masters". Although a fervent nationalist in his heart he was also an admirer of the best in British culture and the way of life. He liked to wear the standard English dress and also to live like an Englishman. He confessed that he did not know why he never smoked or drank alcohol, although he accepted the fact that a cigarette and a peg of whisky were essential part of English life. A funny anecdote from his young days was that for a while in his eagerness to be like the Englishman he jokingly described his name, B.C. Roy as "Benjamin Charles Roy". But this did not in any way detract from his strong nationalist fervour and his instinct to protest against the superiority complex of the British masters, and resist all examples of perceived racial arrogance and discrimination.

If Lukis was his patron, another English Professor, Col. Peek caused damage to him professionally and emotionally. One day, when Bidhan was at the Calcutta Medical College gate Peek's horse carriage was hit by a tram car in front of the gate. The horse carriage driver was at fault as he had thought that a sahib's brougham must necessarily have precedence over a public carriage. Peek asked Bidhan to appear as a witness for him in the court case against the Calcutta Tramways Company for damages. Bidhan said that in his opinion the Professor's

coachman who thought that being a sahib's coachman he had priority, was responsible for the accident and that he would only speak the truth if called upon to be witness. Col. Peek was unnerved at this audacity, but took his revenge in an unethical fashion when Bidhan had to appear before him for the viva voce in the final M.B. examination. He actually failed Bidhan. The young bright student was heartbroken. He had failed in an examination for the first time.⁴ But Bidhan's mentor, Lukis consoled him and advised him to take the L.M.S. qualifying examination to be held a fortnight later and then take the M.D. Examination two years later. As chance would have it, Col. Peek was to be in charge of the viva voce again. But Lukis interceded with Peek telling him how he had been unjust to his truthful student and that here was an opportunity for him to rectify his own mistake. This time, the Professor of Midwifery was receptive and sympathetic. He even asked Bidhan why he did not appeal to him for re-examination for the M.B. Thus by a supreme irony Bidhan, a legendary medical student, graduated not through the prestigious M.B. examination, but the unglamorous L.M.S. examination.

House Physician, Calcutta Medical College

Bidhan accepted the post of Assistant Surgeon in the Provincial Medical Service and was posted as House Physician under Col. Lukis. In this capacity, he was not only given opportunity to teach students in the clinical classes, but also to build up his practice which had always been his goal. As a practitioner, he charged a fee of Rs. 2/- only but in return gave himself up completely nursing his patients and preparing their food if need be. Thus even at the start of his career, he made a name for himself of being a doctor with a heart, a prelude to the legend that he became in the entire land from the Khybar Pass to Rangoon. Along with his work in the hospital and his practice, Bidhan was also preparing his thesis for the M.D. during those two years. His salary was just Rs. 700.00 a month. He had not only to maintain a house, but save some of his earnings to fulfil his ambition to go to the UK for higher studies in medicine. Col. Lukis not only guided him in his thesis and his work, but would applaud in public his qualities as a doctor.

4. Thomas, K.P. Ibid pp. 51-52.

Bidhan's years as a student and thereafter as an Assistant Surgeon were marked by a running battle with the British members of the Indian Medical Service who, with a few exceptions like Col. Lukis, were obsessed with a sense of racial superiority, a mission to govern the lowly Indian people whom they looked down upon. Invariably, young Bidhan raised his voice of protest whenever he faced instances of racial discrimination or injustice.

Once he had forgotten paying the dissection fee in time and was fined Rs. 1 with a formal notice. He replied that he had not received his scholarship dues for several months. The new Principal saw reason in it and exempted him from the fine thereby reinforcing his belief that some of the British officials had a very keen sense of justice and fairness. On another occasion, a Jewish lady was by mistake admitted to the European female ward on an extra bed specially put there instead of being admitted to the Ezra Hospital which was for Jewish patients. Actually, the ward in charge had read the scribbling by the Admitting officer "admit Ezra" as "admit Extra". Bidhan on a round noticed this and corrected this by ordering this lady's transfer to the Ezra Hospital. Urwin, the white Resident Surgeon felt that reversing an Englishman's order by an Indian doctor was too much of an affront and restored the original arrangement out of cussedness. This became an IMS vs Indian doctors issue. Bidhan was not a person to take this lying down and took it up with Col. Lukis who studied the whole sequence of events and rebuked Urwin and restored Bidhan's instructions. Recalling this incident, Bidhan said,

Col. Urwin sent a very adverse report about me to the Secretariat. But it had to go through Col. Lukis and Lukis sorted out that portion of the report about my work and wrote down his own opinion instead and pasted it on the confidential files.

So great was Lukis' confidence in Bidhan and his regard for fair play that several times he had to intervene and put off the racial arrogance of the British doctors by ordering that "the wards are under my charge and in my absence Dr. Roy is in charge of the wards." On another occasion he sent the following note to another racist Professor:

Roger, the Cholera Ward by itself is not assigned to any physician and according to the rules of the Hospital, it belongs to the Principal. Dr. Roy, my House Physician is incharge of this ward in my absence. In future, when you enter the Cholera Ward, please take the permission of Dr. Roy.

Col. Lukis, a believer in the modernising role of Britain in India, but fully sympathizing with the national aspirations of Indians used to tell Dr. Roy. "Bidhan I will teach you one thing in life. Whenever you meet an Englishman, never bend your back even by quarter of an inch because he will make you bend double." Once Bidhan was insulted by Col. Bird, the senior physician of the College for not raising his hand on the steps of the Hospital. Bidhan's point was that when he wore European dress, it was sufficient if he recognized his superiors and wished them, and that there was no rule of etiquette requiring him to salaam a superior after the Indian fashion. He said that he did not salaam even his immediate superior, Lukis, As Bird was adamant, the issue had to be taken to the Principal. Lukis tried to soften Bird, but without success. Thereafter, he coolly told Bidhan, "Bidhan don't wish him in future. Don't go near him, Such members of the Service bring the reputation of the whole service to the mud." Bidhan obeyed this instruction and avoided meeting Bird in the wards so long as he was in the Medical College. But when he was about to leave for England, Bird came up and wished him luck and gave him letters of introduction to several friends in England.⁵

To England for Higher Studies

Bidhan had always nursed an ambition to go to England for higher studies. After he had saved a reasonable amount, he applied to the Bengal Government for leave without pay for two years and three months. This way promptly rejected on the ground that he had served only for two years, and therefore he was not entitled to such leave. Col. Lukis asked him to appeal to the Lieutenant Governor, Bengal, on the ground that whereas members of the Indian Medical Service largely a preserve of the whites, were given leave with full pay after two years

5. Thomas, K.P. op cit, p. 70.

of service, an Indian was being denied this even without pay. This was racial discrimination. Lukis even called on the Lieutenant Governor and persuaded him to overrule the decision of the Medical department of the Bengal Government. Thus Bidhan got the leave he had asked for. But he was unable to get a berth on a ship which was to sail for England the day after his leave started on the curious ground given by the Shipping Company that either he had to pay for two berths, or get an Indian for the second berth. The company was unable to reserve one berth for a European, and the other for an Indian in the same cabin. Once again, his mentor Lukis intervened and told the General Manager of the Shipping Company in no uncertain terms that Bidhan was “cleaner than the Englishman though his skin may be darker” and they must give him a berth and that a European should not have objection to sharing a cabin with him. The Shipping Company conceded and gave him a berth. A final act of Lukis was the advice to appear for the MRCP (London) and FRCS (England) and not to look for the nearly all white Indian Medical Service on the ground that “the medical service in Calcutta would be in the hands of Indians within the next ten years, and it is desirable that you should be in Calcutta to take a share in this practice.” Bidhan accepted this advice and sailed for England on board the *City of Glasgow* on 22 February, 1909.

Bidhan’s struggle against financial stringence and adverse circumstances continued in his initial months in London. The letters of introduction to St. Bartholomews, the institution that he wanted to join, from Lukis and many of his other professors in Calcutta Medical College who had studied in that Institute were simply ignored by the Dean, Dr. Shore, who advised him to try other hospitals in London. But Bidhan was determined that he must get admission to this institution, and only this institution as it is provided the best facilities for doing MRCP and FRCS together. He would therefore not take Dr. Shore’s “no” and went on meeting him again and again with his entreaties and arguments. He must have met with the Dean more than thirty times in course of a month and a half. At long last Dr. Shore tired of having to argue with a determined Bidhan turned round and asked him to bring the admission fees immediately. But Bidhan did not have the required 40 guineas and requested Dr. Shore to take only

three month's fee in advance and allow him to pay the balance afterwards. The Dean conceded and Bidhan was admitted to St. Bartholomews with advance fee of 10 guineas only. There followed two years of intense hard work in course of which Bidhan readied himself for taking both FRCS and MRCP examinations. In order to know more about the human body, he also spent a lot of time dissecting human bodies in the company of a Venezuelan student. This attracted the attention of Dr. Addison, the Professor of Anatomy. Incidentally, Addison had been a member of selection committee for admission and had a concealed role in persuading the Dean to admit the determined Indian boy. Bidhan also wanted to learn about subjects where the training in India at that time was inadequate. One such area was skin disease. He got himself appointed as Hon. Assistant to the Professor of Skin Diseases and attended his clinic thrice a week. He also joined extra classes in Physiology and took private coaching in Anatomy. He had practically no social life as a student in London. As he never had enough money, he had to deny himself the normal comforts. Also, in order to earn some money, he often left London to act as a standby for a practitioner going on holiday. He paid his landlady about 8 shillings a month, a concessional rent for treating her little daughter free soon after he took up residence in her house. All his efforts and all his privations came to fruition when he was awarded both MRCP and FRCS, a rare accomplishment, in May 1911. Also this came about within his targeted two years. Dr. Shore himself congratulated him with these words:

Dr. Roy, I am really ashamed of my conduct in not admitting you into this Institution when you came to me first. I had rejected your application because I felt, as you came from Bengal and our experience with other Bengali students had not been very happy, that you might, if admitted lower the tradition of this college. Therefore I was resisting your entry into this Institution. But I am glad to tell you that you are perhaps one of the very few students who have obtained both the degrees within a short period of time. I will therefore make amend for my past conduct. I would in future, admit student who obtains a letter of introduction from you without any question.⁶

6. Thomas K.P. Ibid. p. 64.

He kept this promise and for many years for any student seeking admission to St. Bartholomews with recommendation from Dr. B.C. Roy, admission was almost automatic.

Medical Practitioner

Bidhan returned to Calcutta in July, 1911, via Colombo and Chennai and rented a house at 84 Harrison Road. The Country was on the eve of an important political change. The 1905 partition of Bengal was undone in December, 1911. Once again, there was United Bengal Presidency although it was without Bihar where Bidhan had spent his childhood up to graduation. But Bengal paid a heavy price. The capital of British India was shifted from Calcutta to Delhi. Bidhan returned to the Calcutta Medical College. But such was the pervasive racism that an FRCS and MRCP doctor had to be content with the inconsequential and non-challenging job of teaching First Aid to policemen. On his return to Calcutta, he had called on the Surgeon General, Bengal, who those days headed the Medical Services in the Province. He congratulated his old student on achieving the record of obtaining the 'double' (MRCP and FRCS), but bluntly told him that it was out of question for him, a Provincial Medical Service Officer, to get a Professorship in the Medical College, which was Bidhan's long time ambition. That was a preserve of white Indian Medical Service officials, although many of them who were posted as Professors had got lower positions than Bidhan in the same MRCP examination. He told him that he could appoint him in a teaching position in the Campbell Medical School, or give him the post of a Civil Surgeon in a district. Bidhan summarily rejected the second alternative as his vision for himself was always to remain in Calcutta even as a Provincial Service Officer and to build up a practice. Otherwise, he would have tried and joined the Indian Medical Service. But he had to wait for nine months for a vacancy in Campbell Medical School to arise. He filled up this period, as already stated, with a supernumerary job in the Medical College teaching First Aid and ambulance duties to the police constables of Calcutta and holding a tutorial class in

surgery. What an irony for an FRCS-cum-MRCP in British India! He could have refused to do such duties as not appropriate for a holder of the highest degrees in Medicine and Surgery in the British Empire. But in his opinion, no job in the field of medicine was humble for a doctor; he was moved by the warm welcome he got from his students and patients. They helped him to resume his private practice which was marked by resounding success from day one. He raised his medical fee from Rs. 2 to Rs. 8. Soon Dr. B.C. Roy as he was known, built up a reputation as a Physician of rare competence, insight and intuition. His capacity to diagnose a disease and prescribe the right remedy became legendary. His kindness, healing touch and capacity to nurse patients back to health added to this legend. He would not charge fee when a poor patient was unable to pay his fee. In fact, Bidhan would not ordinarily talk about his fee. But once when a rich gentleman requested him to become his family physician on a remuneration of Rs. 150 per year; he politely declined stating that he could charge this amount for a single case from the same gentleman. As chance would have it only a few months later Bidhan received an urgent call to treat a young girl who had taken opium. She turned out to be the same person's daughter. Bidhan revived her and the grateful father promptly paid the doctor the fee of Rs. 150 he had asked for. This was by far the only occasion in his fifty years practice when Dr. B.C. Roy asked for his professional fees. This was done as a matter of principle to drive home to the gentleman concerned the dignity of the profession to which Bidhan belonged.

In the course of half a century of private practice, Dr. Bidhan Roy never sent a bill to any patient, nor asked for professional fee, but depended on the patient to pay according to the known rate. When a patient was unable to pay his fee, on account of low income, Bidhan would never press. He had a meteoric rise as a medical practitioner within a few years, and his fame as a miracle curer of difficult ailments spread all over the subcontinent. Wherever a patient anywhere in India had lost all hopes as a last resort, Dr. Roy would be called. The single biggest factor for his success was the optimism that he inspired in his patients. With a smiling face and with total knowledge of the human system both as a physician and as a surgeon, Bidhan would approach a patient, give him an overall diagnosis of what had gone

wrong, give him hope and a total scheme of recovery covering medicines, diet and changes in the life-style. His own philosophy was 'Do your best and leave to God the rest'. He gave his patients complete sympathy, and they in their turn gave him trust and confidence. The conjunction of the two brought about miracles for which Dr. B.C. Roy became famous.

He would start each day by making a list of the number of persons who wanted to be seen by him and would make it a point to see each one of them, be it Mahatma Gandhi or Motilal Nehru, the most famous among his patients, or a humble resident of Kalighat or Shyambazar. There are innumerable stories current in this country of the miraculous cures Dr. Roy brought about and how his mere presence brightened up suffering men and women. He would often provide a treatment that was unorthodox according to conventional medical standards covering a total treatment of the body system, not only simply prescribing standard medicine for the diagnosed disease. "Once you take up this attitude of mind in a profession", said Dr. Roy to his biographer, "nothing can go wrong with it. After all, the medical profession is not a business concern. The knowledge, the skill, the sympathy and the devotion which a doctor gives to his patients can never be measured in terms of money. A doctor should always feel that he has a sacred duty towards suffering humanity and he should have unbounded kindness for every one".⁷ And he gave equal attention to each one of them, rich or poor. On one occasion when a 12 year old boy studying in a village school in Burdwan District was suffering from some disease which no one could cure, he was told by a physician jokingly even if he couldn't cure him, Dr. Bidhan Roy could do some thing. Though this village boy was seriously ill, somehow he took courage and managed to go to the house of Dr. B.C. Roy in Wellington Square and fell at his feet. Dr. Roy realized the boy's precarious condition and also his financial and family background. He took him under his care and asked him to stay in his house, gave him a room and after he had recovered a little asked him to join a school in Calcutta. He also arranged a tutor for this boy. Afterwards, he asked him to go home and obtain his parents' permission to stay in the Doctor's

7. Thomas-Ibid p. 76.

house and complete his school education.⁸ His fame as a physician spread far and wide in a short time. People would call him Dhanwantari after the great physician in the ancient Indian mythology. His diagnostic intuition became legendary. But he always remained a humble man for his patients and their physicians even when he ascended the zenith of both medical profession and political career and was always willing to listen to them. All this made him a living legend, a miracle man in the whole subcontinent by the 1930s. Those days the Rajas, Zamindars and top businessmen were usually accustomed to calling European doctors to their homes whenever they fell ill. Dr. Roy, along with his mentor, Sir N.R. Sarcar and few others, were responsible in no small measure in changing this attitude and turning them to native medical practitioners like himself when they or their family members fell ill.

He joined Campbell Medical School as a teacher of Medicine when the vacancy arose. He was to remain there for several years till 1919 when he joined as Professor in Carmichael Medical College (R.G. Kar Medical College later). His entire period in Campbell School was marred by a running battle with the racist Superintendent of the School, Major Reit. Bidhan never tolerated insults and always gave them back. In their very first encounter, Reit told Bidhan that his salary of Rs. 330 a month was too much for the work that he was doing. Bidhan's retort was that he failed to understand why a person who had got the MRCP and FRCS from UK and MD from Calcutta should get only Rs. 330 a month while another who had even failed in the Edinburgh Fellowship (meaning Reit) should get Rs. 1500 a month. He continued, "perhaps the only reason for this difference is the colour of the skin". Reit continued to give Dr. Roy one pinprick after another. An order issued by him stated that Dr. Roy was to be present in the Anatomy Department every day between 12 Noon to 3 PM in addition to his class hours. Bidhan protested against this stating that what was important was "the efficiency of the person and not the number of hours he worked". A few days later, when Reit wrote to him asking whether he would be able to take tutorial classes for Surgery students between 4 and 5 in the evening, Bidhan simply did not reply. Asked by Reit what had happened to his letter and why there was no reply, Bidhan said "the letter has gone to the place it deserved to go, viz the waste paperbasket." Reit threatened him with disciplinary action. Bidhan's impassioned

8. From a letter received by the author from Mr. Samiran Sanyal, Journalist. His father was a tutor of the village school where this boy studied.

reply was “if that be so, I am prepared to argue the case before the highest authorities.” Reit did not pursue this matter further. But the slinging match continued. Reit’s racist vendetta and Roy’s nationalist protest found reflection in such incidents as Reit’s insistence on Indians raising their hat whenever they came across a white Professor and Dr. Roy’s flouting this on the ground that this was not the custom in England, or Dr. Roy’s conscientious objection to a Campbell custom for students to shut their umbrella whenever they came face to face with a Professor. Bidhan felt that it should be enough for the students to do ‘namaste’ or say ‘good morning’. Things reached a comic height when towards the end of his days in Campbell Major Reit sent for Bidhan and asked him “Dr. Roy, do you think that I am a fool.” Bidhan’s quotable reply was, “it is difficult for me to give an answer. If I said ‘Yes’, you would not like the answer, and if I said ‘No’, it would hurt my conscience”. Shortly afterwards Major Reit decided to leave Campbell prematurely because he realized that he did not possess the requisite qualification to be Superintendent of a School which had teachers who were much more qualified. But before he left he made up with Bidhan and expressed regret for his behaviour.

Dr. B.C. Roy’s fame was fast spreading and soon there came a turning point in his career. One day, his car was stopped at the College Street-Bowbazar Street crossing by Dr. Mrigendra Lal Mitra, a senior physician of Calcutta those days, who requested him to agree immediately to become Professor of Medicine in the Carmichael Medical School which was being upgraded to a Medical College. This College’s application for affiliation with the Calcutta University was under consideration of the Syndicate which had refused to accept their selection of a Professor of Medicine and suggested that they would be willing to sanction affiliation if Dr. B.C. Roy became the Professor of Medicine. They would decide “yes” or “no” within a few hours. It was rumoured that Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, the Vice Chancellor had suggested Dr. Roy’s name. Bidhan took an instantaneous decision, turned his car back to the Campbell School and submitted his resignation to the new Superintendent, Col. Leventon. The Superintendent completely taken aback, cautioned him not to take such a hasty decision. But Bidhan was determined and would not

change his mind. Matters moved fast. The news was conveyed to the Syndicate and the University sanctioned the affiliation of the Carmichael Medical College. Dr. Roy remained a Professor of the Carmichael Medical College, and thereafter R.G. Kar Medical College for many years. Even as Chief Minister, West Bengal, he remained as a Professor on leave in this College. Assisted by many eminent men like Sir Nilratan Sarkar, Dr. L.M. Banerjee, Dr. Mrigendra Lal Mitra, Dr. Sarbadhikary and Dr. M.N. Banerjee, he was to see this institution grow into one of the leading medical institutions of the country which attracted students from all over the subcontinent. While much has been said about Dr. B.C. Roy as a medical practitioner, there is little on record about what a great teacher of medicine he was. According to one of his students in the Carmichael Medical College in 1939, his lectures were of such high standard and attained such fame all around that even students of the Calcutta Medical College, *creme de la creme* among medical institutions, used to come in large numbers to attend his lectures.⁹

The same former student¹⁰ recalls that when he was appearing in the viva voce of the MBA examination, Dr. B.C. Roy, along with another leading doctor, was the examiner. The second examiner had asked a question which he was taking about one or two minutes to answer. The examiner told him “go out”. But Dr. Roy gently intervened and told him “tell the answer you know”. Encouraged by his comforting voice, he gave the correct reply. Then Dr. Roy said “Now you can go”. While coming out of the room he heard Dr. Roy telling his fellow examiner “You were unnecessarily condemning the boy.”

In the meteoric rise of Dr. Roy in the medical profession, two great Indian doctors, both legends in Calcutta in the early years of the 20th Century made very significant contribution- Sir Nilratan Sarkar, a physician and Dr. Suresh Sarbadhikary, a surgeon. Both of them saw great potential in this young doctor and gave him all their patronage. Bidhan remained ever grateful to them. Nilratan who came to know young Bidhan as a young doctor who would accompany patients from the hospital to his house for his advice was highly impressed

9. Recollections of Dr. Narayan Kumar Roy, a student of Dr. Roy.

10. Ibid.

with him and always took an interest in Bidhan's career thereafter. It was with Nilratan's advice that he took house on Harrison Road to set up a medical practice. On that occasion, he jokingly told Bidhan that they should call Harrison Road the Harley Street of Calcutta, as so many well-known doctors were practising on that street.

Nilratan worked closely with Dr. Roy in the Calcutta University Senate, and in the R.G. Kar Medical College. He also cooperated with him in the growth of Jadavpur T.B. Hospital and in setting up the Chittaranjan Seva Sadan as a memorial to Chittaranjan Das. He always made it a point to highlight the great injustice meted out to Dr. Roy by a racist regime when a person who had topped the MRCP examination and had done the FRCS simultaneously in the record time of two years and had in addition done M.D. in Calcutta University was not given any preference on his return from England and had to remain in the same position while Englishmen who were much lower in the MRCP list were appointed to much higher positions. He quoted this in his evidence before the Royal Public Service Commission (1912). He was always careful to give Bidhan a special consideration as if to amend for this injustice, and would always make himself available for Bidhan as long as he lived.

Dr. Suresh Sarbadhikary, a distinguished surgeon, also remained a father figure whether working together in the Senate of Calcutta University or in the Carmichael Medical College which Bidhan joined in 1919, or the Bengal Medical Education Society of which he was the President, or in the on-going fight against the British officers of the Indian Medical Service around this time.^{10A} An incident that showed how Bidhan put principles above all personal factors and could protest whenever he saw any glaring injustice can be narrated. For the election to a vacant seat in the Governing Body of the Bengal Medical Education Society, Dr. B.C. Roy had locked horns with his senior Dr. Mrigendra Lal Mitra. When counting was over it was seen that the relatively unknown B.C. Roy had got 19 votes and the redoubtable Dr. Mitra 18. Now Dr. Suresh Sarbadhikary who was presiding got up from his chair and announced that he had not given his own vote earlier but would now do so in favour of Dr. Mitra. Now there was a tie of 19:19. Then Dr. Sarbadhikary, a mentor of Dr. Roy but wanting to favour age gave his casting vote for Dr. Mitra and declared him elected. Dr. Roy was upset, and wrote to Sarbadhikari accusing him of favouritism,

10A. Thomas p. 134.

parochialism and immorality. Dr. Sarbadhikary realized that he had been unjust and told Dr. Roy that he would call another meeting to declare Dr. Mitra's election as void and call upon the members to have another election. Bidhan's reply was typical of him. "Sir, you have made one mistake. I would not like you to make another. There is no hurry about my getting into Managing Committee. As you have already taken some action, however irregular, it is better to let it remain as it is at the present moment."¹¹ But Bidhan and Dr. Sarbadhikary continued to remain good friends as long as the latter lived helping each other whenever any occasion arose.

In the field of medicine Bidhan Chandra Roy was a household name as was Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, the social reformer-cum-educationist and Swami Vivekananda the Vedantist preacher who carried India's message of religion and faith to the Western world. Indeed, it was from his base in the field of medicine that Dr. Roy was able to play such a major role in politics and later in the field of economic and social reconstruction of the country. Dr. Roy as a doctor had easy access to the national leaders and this, to a great extent, helped him in developing his political position, his acumen and ultimately his administrative skill. Having been trained in mathematics and thereafter in medicine and surgery he arrived at a decision on sound logic with mathematical precision and his knowledge of men and material was infallible. Added to this was his dogged perseverance and urge to go forward with his diagnostic intuition and experience. A shrewd judge of men, the way he made use of them was a revelation to everyone. He knew who would be able to deliver the goods. Rank or status did not matter, but the ability to get things done was all that would count. His wonderful memory helped him follow up whatever work he took up and never gave up any worthy cause as lost. He could feel that pulse of his countrymen and act according to their wishes and his own instinct.

11. Thomas-Ibid p. 133.

Entry Into Legislative Politics

Before Bidhan Chandra Roy joined politics in full steam he had apprenticeship in a leading institution of Bengal viz., the Calcutta University. As a teacher in Campbell and a Professor in Carmichael he got interested in University education and for that matter, the affairs of the Calcutta University. He came to know Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, the famous Vice Chancellor of the University and father of Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and became close to him. Ashutosh suggested that he should become a Fellow of the University. Where Bidhan showed his difference from others was that he refused to follow the standard practice prevailing those days of a candidate registering a hundred fresh graduates with his own money and thus purchasing their votes. Instead he offered himself as a candidate with his own credentials. He was elected with a huge majority defeating such well-known rival candidates as Charu Chandra Biswas and Manmatha Nath Roy. He entered the Senate in 1916 and straightaway made a mark in the University matters. He fought relentlessly for the University's autonomy. In 1921 he protested in the Senate against some remarks by Sir P.C. Mitter in the Bengal Legislative Council against the University. He argued that as the University was not represented in the Council, it was improper for a Member of the Senate, Mitter, to make such remarks in the Council. With solid backing from Sir Ashutosh he moved a resolution in the Senate to this effect. In March, 1922, when Sir Ashutosh's second term as Vice-Chancellor was over, Governor Lord Lytton proposed his reappointment subject to his fulfilling certain conditions. Ashutosh showed Bidhan the Governor's letter. Bidhan agreed with Ashutosh that the conditions stipulated were humiliating. Ashutosh rejected this offer making his famous statement, "Freedom first, Freedom second and Freedom always." Slowly but surely in his mission to assert the right of Indians, and oppose the racist and authoritarian

politics of the British rulers, Bidhan was gravitating to politics. But politics for him was service to his downtrodden nation. Deeply influenced by the freedom movement that was sweeping over the country since his student days in Calcutta and was now entering into a new phase under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership around 1920-21, Bidhan had grown into a fervent nationalist who was mentally prepared to play a meaningful role in politics. He did not take active part in the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1921. But thereafter circumstances induced Bidhan to step into politics. The rising tide of protests against the half-baked Montague Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 had influenced him.

The Barrackpore Election

Elections to the Bengal Legislative Council under this scheme, were due in 1923. It was Sir Ashutosh who first suggested that Dr. Roy should contest for the Legislative Council. Several constituencies were considered, but eventually his friends zeroed in on North Calcutta municipal constituency, better known as the Barrackpore constituency where the sitting member was Sir Surendra Nath Banerjee, father of Indian nationalism but now turned moderate and loyalist. He had courted unpopularity by accepting ministership under the Montague Chelmsford constitutional system which the nationalists vehemently opposed. Dr. Roy agreed to contest against Surendra Nath. But Surendra Nath was a legend, and this was his homeground. Dr. Roy reckoned that if he was defeated, it would be by a giant, and if he won, it would reflect the people's resounding verdict against an unpopular system. He took his election campaign seriously meeting individuals and addressing gatherings. In his election manifesto, he announced that he did not belong to any party and had no ambition in politics. By entering politics he could strive to improve the conditions of the people. He struck a unique note in his manifesto when he said, "In India there were two parties - the party of the few who profited from the activities of the Government and the party of many who suffered from the same activities." "I do not belong to the party of the Government," he also said. He made no personal criticism of Surendra Nath and kept his speeches at impersonal level. He even declared several times that he would withdraw from the election if Sir Surendra Nath resigned from ministership. He also showed a rustic sense of humour everywhere. At a meeting in Paikpara, a youngman asked whether he would give to the

local Harisabha a donation larger than Rs. 2000 which Surendra Nath had promised.¹² Dr. Roy quipped, “Is your Harisabha on auction?” People in general appreciated his freedom from vanity or rancour, and the absence of personal animosity. When Dr. Roy had taken the decision to contest, the Congress under Gandhi’s influence had decided not to participate in the elections. But after a while Gandhiji yielded to Chittaranjan Das’s arguments to allow the Congress Swarajyist to contest in these elections. Chittaranjan sent for young Bidhan and requested him to offer himself as a Congress (Swarajya) candidate. Bidhan refused to sign the Congress pledge on the ground that he was already half way in his campaign as an independent candidate and would lose his face with those voters to whom he had already made his appeal. Although he fully supported the Swarajya stand, it was a matter of conscience. Chittaranjan asked what would happen if the Swarajya Party put up its own candidate. Bidhan said that this would be unfortunate as the anti-Surendra Nath votes would be split. But he was unable to accept CR Das’s request. He had even announced in his own election manifesto that he had conscientious objection to identifying himself with any political party. A few days later, Chittaranjan had second thoughts and climbed down from his high horse. He told Bidhan that Swarajyists would support Bidhan.

The general elections of 1923 excited popular interest in Bengal as never before. The Swarajya Party, after the official Congress session in Delhi had permitted it to contest, threw itself whole heartedly into these elections. There were Swarajyist candidates everywhere except in Barrackpore where they supported Bidhan. C.R. Das himself went all out to seek votes for Bidhan. For weeks the entire nation’s eyes were glued to the constituency where it was a re-play of David and Goliath. When the results came on 30 November 1923, it sent electrifying shock everywhere. This unknown 42 year old doctor, a greenhorn in politics, became a giant killer. He secured 5688 votes against only 2283 votes polled by Surendra Nath, hitherto called the uncrowned king of Bengal. Several years later, Shri P.C. Mitter accused Bidhan on the floor of the Bengal Council of “hounding out of public life a leader like Surendra Nath Banerjee.” But Roy’s stand, then as

12. Thomas, K.P. Op cit p. 91-93.

during the memorable elections, was that in opposing Surendra Nath he never forgot the debt the country owed to the distinguished leader, but opposed him as a matter of conscience because “by accepting office he has identified himself with the bureaucracy.”

In the Bengal Assembly

Bidhan continued to hold this constituency for several terms until he had to withdraw from the Legislature under a direction from the Congress during Mahatma Gandhi's Civil Disobedience Movement, in 1930. Very soon he made his mark as a legislator. He sat with the Swarajya Party, and identified himself with it, although he never remembered whether or when he formally became a Member of the Congress. He became a close associate of Deshbandhu C.R. Das who provided floor leadership to the Swarajya opposition. Between the two a political partnership developed based on mutual admiration and understanding. Das soon discovered Bidhan's worth and took him into confidence in preparing his historic constructive scheme to be placed before the Government by him as the leader of the Opposition. Bidhan's contribution was substantial. The strategy of the Swarajya Party under the leadership of C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru was to expose the hollowness of the 1919 Montford Reforms from within the Legislature. It would oppose the Ministers at every step and create procedural deadlocks.

Soon Bidhan showed his mettle as an outstanding and great speaker. In the initial years he showed less interest in national issues on which the Swarajists had captured the Council, and more interest on the local grievances of the electorate of his constituency, for instance, the threatened demolition of a temple in a Royal Calcutta Turf Club owned plot of land or constructing a pathway to the Railway Bridge at Bally. He took great interest in educational and medical matters. In 1925, he moved a resolution suggesting an annual grant of Rs 3 lakhs to the Calcutta University to meet its recurring deficits. In his brilliant speech on this occasion with a wealth of facts and figures, he accused the Government of repeatedly breaking promises and trying to officialise the University and creating differences between community and community, and academicians and academicians. He supported the Dacca University Bill (1925) and the 1928 Amendment Bill, but deplored

the communal appeal of some members like Sir Abdur Rahman and the official machinations to set up the new University as a rival to the Calcutta University. He wanted each of the five Divisions in Bengal to have one University.

He took special interest on the problems relating to public health and medical relief and problems of higher education. He consistently opposed proposals to subvert the University autonomy such as subordinating the Academic Council of the Calcutta University to Executive Council. Similarly, he consistently argued for decentralization of medical administration or for that matter, administration of all subjects, opposed difference in official treatment of Government medical schools and private medical schools and the preferential treatment to the members of the Indian Medical Service. He pleaded for the Government to directly conduct the training of nurses, and to offer inducement to Indian ladies to enter the profession of nursing. He opposed all attempts to officialise the Bengal Council of Medical Registration. As early as 1925, he moved a Resolution for appointment of a Committee for ascertaining the cause of the pollution of the Hooghly river and suggesting measures, legislative or otherwise, to prevent pollution. He offered evidence of considerable research in this technical subject.

An area in which Dr. Roy always took serious interest was the annual budget. He invariably spoke giving the Finance Member an uncomfortable time, questioning the wisdom of many allotments, showing discrepancies and criticizing the disappearance or reduction of anticipated surpluses. In 1924, long before development and planning became serious business, Bidhan supported the concept that the surplus of revenue over expenditure should be constituted into a Special Fund to be devoted to nation-building activities. He would always show an eye for details, a trait that stood him in good stead years afterwards as Chief Minister when he stood head and shoulders above his predecessors and his successors.

Bidhan would spare no occasion to emphasize the hollowness of the 1919 Reforms and the fact that "the elected Council had no power to transfer an amount from one head to another. Hence the only

alternative left to us is to raise a loud cry so that not only the Government and the members may hear it but also those in England in whose hands lies our destiny.” Meanwhile, Bidhan had become the Swarajya spokesman in the Council and also the Deputy leader after Deshbandhu’s demise with J.M. Sengupta as the leader. Bidhan took a keen interest in the Government reducing the cost of governance, and in improving the infrastructure. He pleaded for the construction of a new Howrah Bridge and for adding a pathway to the Railway Bridge at Bally. He showed his ingenuity by suggesting that since for the latter project, the primary beneficiaries would be industries on both sides of the river, they should be made to contribute to the cost of the project. On each occasion, when he spoke, he was constructive in his criticism, and betrayed no personal rancour even when he criticized the Government for its failings. “He never sought to demolish anything without suggesting what should replace the feature sought to be demolished and how the replacement should be effected.” But a recurring theme was that there should be a democratic decentralization and more power should be given to the people. In 1929, he strongly supported Nalini Ranjan Sarkar’s Bengal Industrial Development Bill because of his strong conviction that there must be a policy of speedy development of the people. Here also he foreshadowed his glorious days as Chief Minister of West Bengal.

His first political speech in the Council was on 24 February 1926, when he supported Birendra Nath Sasmal’s motion for the removal of the President, Kumar Shib Sekhareshwar Roy on the ground that he had wrongfully taken disciplinary action against certain members. His speech was not only rich in terms of wealth of constitutional precedents and case laws taken from scholarly works such as Graham’s *Mother of Parliament*, but was marked by sharp retort and wits. “Sometimes, a deaf ear is as useful to the President of an Assembly as the blind eye was to Nelson” or “In India when prestige enters by the front door dignity escapes by the back door.” He reached true oratorical heights when he ended by saying, “If this motion is lost, (as it was), the result will be due to the Government being able to command a subservient and slavish majority. In that case, I shall be able to throw

open the doors of the House and show to the people the figure of the elected President of the Council as a henchman tied to the Treasury Bench and clothed in a robe of privilege by a benign Government.”¹³

In August 1927, he moved motions of ‘no confidence’ against the two Ministers at that time - B. Chakravorty and A.K. Ghaznavi. He argued so well combining facts with reason that even many of the Muslim members who held the balance those days supported the motions which were carried, although the Swarajya Party did not have majority. The two controversial Ministers had to go. Bidhan proved how inadequate and disappointing the Montford Constitution was and argued that the Reforms should be done away with sooner than later. Gradually, he plunged himself deep into political issues. In 1927, he moved an adjournment motion to discuss the strike of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway employees at Kharagpur and the police firing on the strikers. In March 1928, he intervened to support a motion for time, the party also chose him to speak on the cut motion to the Police Budget in protest against the police atrocities on Congress volunteers during a hartal to mark the nation’s indignation with the “all white” Simon Commission. On both occasions he ‘displayed both oratorical skill and his capacity for marshalling facts. During the second debate, a European member made a chance remark, almost prophetic that in ten or fifteen years Bidhan might find himself on the Treasury Benches defending the police. As regards the Kharagpur atrocities, he made particular criticism of the District Magistrate making use of the Railway company’s higher officials putting on the hats of the Auxiliary Force to fire on the strikers. As for the police excesses in Calcutta on 3rd February 1928, he gave many instances to prove his charge that it was the police and not the public which had been aggressive and had thus provoked violence. “Every act of cruelty I have seen was done deliberately and more than what was justifiable under the circumstances not by Indian policemen but by the European police sergeants”. He also criticized the arrest of respectable citizens like Ramaprasad Mukherjee, and the forcible entry by the police into private houses and assault on families. Another memorable speech was in August, 1928, when he intervened to oppose A.K. Fazlul Huq’s amendment to Sir Abdur Rahim’s Resolution on

13. Thomas K.P. Ibid. p. 101.

India's Constitutional future, advocating separate communal electorates. He argued that the legislature was not the place to discuss this sensitive issue of communal electorate and that it should be settled outside the House by a round-table discussion, among the leaders of the two communities without the presence of the third party, viz., the British rulers.

Coming as he did from an industrial constituency, Roy gave a lot of time to protecting the interests of factory workers. In 1929, there occurred an unprecedented strike of the jute mill workers. On 8 August, 1929, Bidhan moved an adjournment motion to discuss this strike and on the next day delivered one of the most memorable speeches. "I am not a labour leader, bogus or real, but have a right to represent workers who have sent me to this House for the third time." As a Congressman, he tried for a proper adjustment of the right of the capitalists and those of the labourers. He pleaded for a true partnership between the owners and the workers not only in production, but also in profit-sharing, and took the Government to task for intervening on the side of the capitalists and for general mishandling. The censure motion was passed by the House in the face of official opposition.

Bidhan also showed a rare capacity to turn the table on his opponents. Thus, in March 1927, in course of the budget discussion on the Education Department when the controversial D.P.I. Oaten argued that the Muslims were not adequately represented on the Calcutta University bodies, Bidhan floored him with the quick retort, "Why did not you nominate more Muslims on the Senate?" In the same speech, he showed his sarcasm by saying that the members of the Treasury Benches could be divided into three groups :

- (i) Latitudinarians, i.e. members of the Government block who enjoy immense latitude and power, play fast and loose with the liberties of the people and manage finances in a way that their own interests are safeguarded;
- (ii) Attitudinarians, i.e. those amiable people who sit watching the movements of the Government benches and bend their will at every nod of their masters; their attitude is one of purposeful subjection, fulsome flattery and unabashed sycophancy; they

are a disgrace to the community to which they belong; they are the veritable Jaichands and Umidchands of modern political life; and

- (iii) Platitudinarians, i.e. those supporters of the Government who say what they do not mean and mean what they never say.¹⁴

As his biographer, K.P. Thomas has summed up his career as a parliamentarian in the pre-Independence Bengal Council,

“Bidhan has been habitually shy and even now seldom addresses public meetings. In the Bengal Legislative Council his shyness during the first year or two was pronounced. But having started speaking, he progressed by leaps and bounds. He did not, of course, reach even near the standard of oratory set by distinguished orators of Bengal and ably upheld in the Council by the leaders under whom he successively worked. But there is no doubt that within an incredibly short period, he became an able debater in the Council. He might have lacked in what is called eloquence, but did not either inflict the singsong monotony of manuscript oration on the Council as many of the members in those days did. What he lacked in eloquence was more than made up by his able marshalling of facts and cogency of reasoning.” Dignity was the keynote of his speeches and he hated hitting his opponent below the belt. But he could also import into his speeches the usual embellishments of rhetorics.

Now and then, he could indulge in biting sarcasm. He seemed to command a rich storehouse of repartees and made effective use of the weapons in fending himself or his party against attacks by Provas Chandra Mitter or Moberly. As a result, he was serious in the treatment of the subjects he chose to deal with. But he could also “indulge in a little levity” as he said. Even as early as 1924 when participating in the discussion on the Budget Demand under the head, “Forests”, he made a speech punctuated with jokes about the Maharajadhiraj Bahadur of Burdwan. Though the Maharaja was in the opposite camp of politics, he remained a lifelong friend of Dr. Roy. The same wit characterized Bidhan’s speeches on the Bengal Fish Fry Bill moved by Shah Syed

14. Thomas K.P. Ibid. pp. 107-108.

Emdadul Huq in 1926 when his skilful punning of fried fish and fish fry was highly relished by the members of the House including even the mover of the Bill though Bidhan was pleading for virtual shelving of the Bill.¹⁵

15. Thomas K.P. - Dr. B.C. Roy, pp. 106-107.

Mayor of Calcutta

Having made his mark in the University and the Bengal Council, Bidhan, already a member of the Congress Working Committee from 1930, was called upon by the Congress to take another role in 1930-31, viz., leading the Congress councillors in the Calcutta Corporation, another leading institution in Bengal. Political circumstances made his choice inevitable. The Civil Disobedience Movement under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership was on in full swing. Subhas Bose was incarcerated even before Gandhiji's Dandi March. His political rival in Bengal J.M. Sengupta, Mayor of Calcutta was also imprisoned after the movement started. The Congress Party had already left the Legislative Council in January, 1930. Many of the leaders courted imprisonment. The Party was banned. It needed some one to lead the Congress Councillors in the Calcutta Corporation who still remained outside and was expected to remain so. Bidhan, who was opposed to the decision to resign from the Legislative Council *en masse*, but had resigned as a disciplined Congressman was the only Congress leader in Calcutta to fulfil this role. He was therefore selected.¹⁶ He was elected an alderman of the Corporation for 1930-31 and remained so for three years. He was to be elected once again in 1938-39 and remained till 1943-44. He was elected Mayor twice. At the very first meeting of the Corporation in 1931-32 which he attended as alderman Subhas Bose, temporarily out of prison, proposed Bidhan's name for Mayorship, and he was unanimously elected. In congratulating the new Mayor on his unanimous election, Netaji Subhas spoke of his "brilliant record of public career, although comparatively a newcomer in this House."¹⁷ Next year, he had to face a contest, but was elected having secured 42 votes as against 26 polled by J. N. Moitra and

16. Thomas K.P. Ibid pp. 107-108.

17. Thomas K.P. Ibid. p. 110.

only 8 by A.K. Fazlul Huq. Apart from the six months when he was imprisoned along with other members of the Congress Working Committee, he kept a day-to-day contact with the city's rate payers. He loved the city of Calcutta and would take pride in the fact that as a physician he had been to every lane and by-lane of this great metropolis. He was therefore well acquainted with the civic problems the city and its people faced, and as Mayor, did everything he could to solve them. Apart from the regular duties as Mayor, he served as Chairman of a large number of committees ranging from the Finance Standing Committee and the Services Standing Committee on to Stray Bulls and Cattle Committee, Play-Ground Facilities Committee or Beggar Problems Committee. These names indicate the wide range of his interests. He took every Committee seriously. Contemporary Councillors recall that he was the first Mayor to be in his office by noon and invariably worked there till 3 PM. Immediately after his election in 1931, he resurrected a blueprint of civic action outlined by Deshbandhu C.R. Das before death snatched him and swore his resolve to give effect to it with "a pure heart and honest effort" in order to bring about the uplift of the poor and the relief of the sufferer. On 14 May, 1930 as a leader of the Congress Party he moved a Resolution offering the Corporation's homage to Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence.¹⁸ Some time later, as Mayor, Bidhan was party to another unanimous Resolution expressing the Corporation's grief at the execution of Dinesh Gupta, one of the three daredevil revolutionaries who had got into the Writer's Building in Calcutta and shot dead Col. Simpson, the Inspector General of Prisons. What he said during the passing of this Resolution bears repetition:

As a matter of personal conviction, as a matter of policy followed by the Congress, one does not accept the method adopted by him. But at the same time we cannot but show our respect and pay our homage to the courage and devotion, however, misdirected it might have, which he (Dinesh) showed even to the last moment when he gladly, from all accounts, put the hangman's noose round his neck and almost the last

18. Ibid. p. 112.

words he uttered were *Bande Mataram*.”¹⁹ At his request the members stood up to show their respects to the martyr.

After a few days, Mahatma Gandhi asked for the rescinding of this Resolution because he felt that it amounted to condoning violence. Bidhan was faced with a tricky problem whether to offend the Mahatma, or the public opinion. He solved the problem with his typical ingenuity. At the time of the confirmation of the proceedings which contained this Resolution at the next meeting of the Corporation, he wrote in his own hand that while it was not permissible to expunge a Resolution already passed, it should be placed on record that he had wanted it to be withdrawn in accordance with the wishes of Mahatma Gandhi.

In 1932, from the Mayor's chair he vehemently protested against some accusations made in England by Sir Charles Tegart, former Commissioner of Police, that the Calcutta Corporation provided terrorists and their relatives with jobs, largely as teachers. He also criticized the European Association of Calcutta for printing and circulating the full text of Tegart's speech which was untrue and calculated to tarnish the image of the Corporation. "So far as the subject matter of the charge is concerned" thundered Bidhan from the Mayoral chair:

I repeat what I said before that it is an absolutely unwarranted and a deliberate lie and a calumny uttered at a crucial moment in the country's history to mislead the uninformed and to create an unjustifiable prejudice against the Corporation.

It is one thing to use the expression, 'those who had suffered in the country's cause'. It is another thing to pass on almost immediately to the sequel: the result had been an impression that for years this civic body has provided terrorists and their relatives with jobs largely in the capacity of teachers. It is a very queer jump from 'suffering in the country's cause to terrorists', -an attempt at the conversion of one group or category of persons into another. Why is Sir Charles Tegart so

19. Thomas, Ibid p. 115.

anxious to confuse issues? What was the urgency for the great Knight to make such a speech? Why again has the European Association taken this trouble of printing and distributing copies of this speech? . . . I say that it is a part of a political propaganda against this great Corporation. . . Assuming for argument's sake that a person employed here had at one time been connected with terrorism, does that bar that individual from being appointed, if he is otherwise qualified and if he has ceased to be a terrorist?²⁰

As Mayor he left his everlasting mark in substantially increasing the provision for expansion of free education, free medical aid to the poor, improved roads, increased water supply, better lighting and such other amenities. He also showed ingenuity in discovering new, untapped, sources of revenue, in reducing the area of the civic body's financial dependence on the Government and relying increasingly on self - help so as to lessen Government's octopus-grip on the Corporation, in bringing down a set of principles for sanctioning grants-in-aid to hospitals and charitable dispensaries and in introducing competitive examination for recruitment to the Corporation's clerical services.

On 23rd March, 1933, Bidhan digressed from his topic to give a brilliant exposition of the relationship between the Government and the Corporation:

If I am a true prophet, if I have any foresight, I predict that when a democratic Government or a Government which is responsible to the legislature comes into being, you will find this conflict would grow bitter and more bitter for the reason that there will then be two bodies, both claiming to represent the people -- not one body which is at present a bureaucratic body, but two bodies which would both try to prove to the world that they represent the people. One body, namely the Legislature will have the whip hand and the Corporation councilor will not be worth his position in the Corporation if he is

20. Thomas Ibid. page. 114.

not prepared to stand up and fight against usurpation by Government of the power which are vested in the Corporation by Statute.²¹

Once again he was prophetic.

Dr. Roy was also excellent in the art of communicating to the corporators and to the public outside about the achievements during his Mayoralty rattling out facts and figures to show how the Congress Party could be proud of its achievements. "The Corporation", he said, on 31 March 1932, "has changed out of recognition since 1923-24, when you gentlemen came in with the Congress banner in your hands". He also said that he could never say, "we are perfect", because "as we gain in experience our ideals will grow correspondingly". According to him, striving to reach the receding ideals would always impose newer challenges. As summed up by Thomas, his biographer, "Bidhan had his own way of reaffirming and reinterpreting the karma yoga of Hindu philosophy."²² On another occasion, he said:

I have one weakness in me and that is madness for work. We have done well, but much more remains to be done. During the present year in office I hope to face these problems. Whether you like it or not, whether it is a part of my function or not, I refuse to occupy this Mayoral chair merely as an ornamental figure head.²³

It was this passion for work and seriousness of purpose which made him take to task members loitering on the corridors and verandas in the Corporation building and behaving not like city fathers, but like children while the Corporation meeting did not have quorum. No wonder that when his tenure was ending, Mr. Campbell Forrester, on behalf of the European corporators, conceded on the floor of the House that "not a single individual found fault with this Mayor, during his term of office"²⁴ He stayed as an alderman till 1943-44. Bidhan continued to take an active interest in the affairs of the Corporation and the Congress

21. Ibid p. 4.

22. Ibid p. 118.

23. From Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, (NMML) New Delhi.

24. Thomas, K.P. op cit. p. 112.

Municipal Association even long after his Mayoralty and was a power centre in Corporation politics. To illustrate this we reproduce in the footnote an interesting letter to him dated 5 March 1935 from A.K. Fazlul Huq and his reply dated 13 March 1935.²⁵

Assembly Chamber, New Delhi

5 March 1935

Dear Dr. Roy,

I have been thinking of late of writing to you about the impending Mayoral election, but a sort of delicacy stood in my way. I think, however, that I have been very foolish, and hence am writing today.

First, about myself. Personally, I am sure, you bear me no illwill. We have been friends - and even comrades in arms for wellnigh 20 years - and I can claim that you will look upon me with some sort of brotherly love and affection. If you select a Mohammedan, who should it be? Momen? - Well, he is a personal friend, but will he be accepted by the entire Congress group, or by the entire Moslem group? If you think you can carry him through, I will gladly make room for him.

Razzaq? Well, he is to me like a younger brother but will he get the votes of the other group of the Moslems?

Then comes the question of a Hindu. Santosh is a likely candidate. Of course, he is a strong man and the likeliest to succeed, but should he not make room for one whom he regards as his political guru - I mean my humble self. I hope he will be good enough to give me a chance.

You were certainly unkind to me last year, but I hope it was political antagonism which prevented you from supporting me. I hope this will not be repeated this year. If your party accepts me, nothing can prevent my being elected.

I hope you will give this matter your best consideration and decide in my favour. I felt my humiliation last year very deeply, and a further blow from you will perhaps break my heart.

With the deepest regards.

I am
Yours sincerely,
A.K. Fazlul Huq.

25. From the NMML, New Delhi, Dr. B.C. Roy papers.

13 March 1936

My dear Fazlul Huq,

Your letter of the 5th March reached here when I was out of town.

I can assure you that I have no personal illwill either against you or any of your friends. Yes, we have been friends, and if you would just recall the past you should remember that I tried to befriend you whenever I had been approached.

With regard to the Mayoral election, nothing has been decided as yet, but there are chances of the two groups of the Congress working together this year not merely in the Corporation but outside also. If that is brought about, the choice of the Mayor would certainly be made by the joint body.

I am going to Delhi next week and I hope to see you and talk matters over.

I understand that the members of the Sen Gupta group are meeting this afternoon. They will let me know tommorrow what they have decided.

I do not know why you should think that I have any "vanity" with regard to the selection of the Mayor last year or any years. I have only made suggestions to the members knowing fully well that they would do exactly what they thought best. It is not that I have any control over them.

I have done all that is possible for me to do to put your case before the members of both the groups. I have faithfully represented to them the desirability of adopting you as a candidate and I hope they will decide some thing in the near future.

Yours sincerely,
B.C. Roy

A.K. Fazlul Huq, Esq.
Assembly Chamber, New Delhi

The Industrialist Bidhan

Bidhan had the genius to take interest in a lot of subjects, and indeed, to flit from one area to another and leave his creative mark everywhere. Just as he had moved from medical practice to education, then civic administration, and then to serious politics, so also he tried his hand successfully in industry in one of the most remarkable episodes of his life. When his brother Sadhan Roy returned from England as a qualified electrical engineer and wanted to be on his own, Bidhan's creative mind was toying with the idea of setting up an industrial enterprise. In October 1920 Dr. Roy with his family members went to Shillong for a vacation. He was charmed by the scenic beauty of Shillong, but was distressed to see that this town did not have electricity. He got in touch with one R. Dutt, who had taken a lease of the nearby Beadon Falls for generating hydel power, but had done nothing so far. He also consulted his brother Sadhan. They decided to form a joint stock company and to apply for licence for a hydel plant. But when they did so, they come to a formidable road block, viz., the determination of the white Deputy Commissioner to give this licence to an Englishman, one Capt. Morrow. There followed nine months of tussle and the matter had to go up to the Government of India. But Dr. Roy showed his customary missionary zeal and eventually won the licence. Once again, he showed great skill in project management:

Having taken this matter seriously and having received the licence, it was necessary that we should show to the Britishers that an Indian firm, particularly, a Bengalee firm, could also rise to the occasion and make a success of the venture. Very often, I had to go up to Shillong to see things for myself, and although I was not an expert in electricity, I could solve ultimately the difficulties that came in the way. In the end, I had the

satisfaction of giving electricity to Shillong within 18 months after the grant of the licence. I was told that it was a record time for any concern of this type to be completed.”²⁶

This plant gave Shillong electricity for 32 years from 1923, until the State Government nationalized electricity after independence. This was Bidhan's baptism by fire in industrial experience and project management. Years later, when he as Chief Minister, promoted many industrial ventures, people were often astonished at his deep knowledge of industry, and realized that he was not a run of the mill politician. It was Shillong hydel plant which gave him the required experience. To quote his own words:

This venture gave me an idea that an industrialist should not give to the shareholders more than a limited amount of dividend even if the profits were capable of bearing higher dividends. The principle we have followed in this concern has been that after allowing for a dividend of 6 to 7 percent of the available balance from year to year, we either plough back the remainder to the company for development purposes or utilize it to increase the emoluments of the workers or to reduce the rate of current for the consumer. Thus, it was that even unskilled workers who joined us for Rs. 30 in 1923 are now getting more than three times that amount. There is hardly any worker who is getting less than Rs. 60/- as emolument. The current rate has also been reduced. This industrial venture gave me the self-confidence in handling industry from a rational point of view. I am beginning to realize that the whole world is a big industry where we labour and struggle. We have together on the one hand better efficiency in the concern and on the other provide increased return for labour done.²⁷

These wise words have great significance for corporate governance even after seven decades.

26. Thomas op. cit. p. 138.

27. Ibid. p. 138-39.

Another example of Dr. Roy's prompt identification of a business opportunity and his equally prompt action in taking advantage of it was the founding of Airways India. On 16 August 1946, when he was at Shillong and got the news that his home in Calcutta had been attacked by Muslim League goondas, he had to return to Calcutta at a very short notice. He discovered how difficult and time consuming the railway journey between Gauwahati and Calcutta was. At Parbatipur, where the passengers had to change over from metre gauge trains to broad gauge, it was almost impossible to get a berth as the military personnel had commandeered the entire train. Bidhan straightway conceived of the idea of introducing an air service between Gauwahati and Kolkata, a concept that was further to be reinforced by the partition of the country within a short time and the near snapping of the rail link between Assam and Calcutta. Thus came the Airways India with the help of his friend, K.K. Roy, after purchasing several Dakota planes being disposed off by the Air Force. Dr. Roy became the first Chairman, and an air link was opened up between Gauwahati and Kolkata. This airline made a significant contribution in the early years after Partition in restoring Kolkata's air communication links not only with the North-East, but with several towns in North Bengal until it was nationalized in 1953.

Also, Dr. Roy was connected formally or informally with several other private sector commercial concerns such as Hindustan Insurance run by his friend Nalini Rajan Sankar . He served as Chairman of this company for several years in the thirties. It was this head-on experience with industry which gave him a lot of guidance when, as Chief Minister of West Bengal he pioneered many central and state public sector enterprises such as Durgapur Steel, West Bengal State Electricity Board, the Calcutta State Transport Corporation, Harighata Dairy and Kalyani Spinning Mill, and gave fatherly assistance to many private business enterprises such as the Hindustan Motors, the Imperial Chemical Industry, Albert David, Bengal Chemicals, Gluconate Bengal Immunity and Dey's Medical. He took a special interest in encouraging entrepreneurship among Bengalee youngmen so notoriously lacking among them. Whenever any of them came to him with the object of starting an enterprise he was never failing in offering whatever assistance he could by way of guidance or small loan from the Government.

He was very impressed with the Dey Brothers of Dey's Medical in 1941 when he found that they were starting a new chemist shop in Lindsay Street at a time when people were leaving the city in large numbers to escape Japanese bombing. He would often quote this event and Bhupen Dey's reply at that time to his question : "Sir, there will always be a necessity for a druggist's shop even when people are leaving Kolkata, otherwise how will people get medicine?"²⁸ He cherished a dream to restore to Bengal its pioneer position in chemical and pharmaceutical industry created by a stalwart like Sir. P.C. Roy who set up the Bengal Chemicals, which he, as Chief Ministers' tried his best revive and stay in business.

He had excellent personal equation with leading industrialists like G.D. Birla, Sir B.N. Mukherjee, Sir, Badridas Goenka and K.P. Goenka, Anandilal Poddar, B.P. Poddar, Suresh Chandra Roy, Gagan Bihari Lal Mehta, Ramaswami Mudaliar, Juda of Albert Davi and B.M. Birla. He was not only their family physician but friend, philosopher and guide and often interacted with them as one who understood industry and invariably gave them his helping hand in pioneering industrial ventures or solving managerial problems in their enterprises. They, in their turn, gave him full trust and made West Bengal their industrial destination. It would be correct to say that Bidhan had knowledge of the nitty-gritty of industry in a way few politicians in India ever had.

28. Reminiscences of Shri Sudhir Madhav Bose.

A Journalist

We may also note in passing yet another aspect of Dr. Roy's many-splendoured life, viz., his involvement in journalism. Once again as in so many things, it was the Deshbandhu who initiated Bidhan to journalism. Chittaranjan had started the *Forward* in Kolkata in 1923. He persuaded Bidhan to take an interest in the financial aspects of the journal, and its two allied publications - Bangabasi and Atmasakti. After Chittaranjan's untimely death, these three journals, militantly nationalistic in their own ways, became a sacred charge on Bidhan in particular, and on the Big Five of Bengal Congress in general. Bidhan had to bear the main responsibility of gathering funds to meet the gap that existed for ever between the expenditure and the income. '*Forward*' went out of publication soon as a result of a law decree, and a new paper, '*Liberty*' was brought out to fill its vacuum. But the arrest and detention of Sarat Chandra Bose was a big shock to the fledgling newspaper. By 1934, the entire responsibility fell on Dr. Roy who became chairman of the paper with overall responsibility, including editorial responsibility. He purchased the goodwill of the old *Forward* and brought out a new *Forward*. All the journals upheld the best traditions of Indian journals while doing a delicate tightrope walking by supporting both the Congress and the revolutionaries. In the mid-30s, the Congress had lost much public support in Bengal on account of its ambivalent attitude to the Communal award, and the Poona Pact. *Liberty* had to stop publication on a directive of the Congress. Bidhan generally did not interfere with the Editor of *New Forward*. But to support the Congress Working Committee, on one occasion, in 1934 he had to refute an allegation from Subhas Chandra Bose (letter dated 21 March 1934) that *Liberty* and the *Forward* had suppressed some news. In his reply dated 30 March 1934, Dr. Roy stated, "I quite appreciate your complaints against *Forward* because you have been so intimately

connected with the newspaper that you must feel hurt whenever disparaging remarks are made about *Forward*.” He also emphasized that the policy was decided by himself, Tulsi Goswami and Bidhan’s elder brother and the other directors, all acting jointly and sharing the same responsibility.²⁹ He was always concerned about portraying the truth about India outside. He was also “exploring the prospects of newspaper proprietors all over India including some of the Anglo-Indian newspapers to form a Newspaper Proprietors Association which could take up control of both internal and external news agency. It may be that this Association will ultimately take up the control of the United Press and act in a manner similar to what the Newspaper Proprietors Associations in England and America are doing. G.D. Birla’s letter dated 2 October 1933 promising support to the UPI is of interest.

It can survive if the business is conducted purely on economic basis. As I understand you are taking keen interest in the newly born baby and as I too feel that there is need for a national news service, I hope you will pay more attention to it than to the *Forward*. A News Agency is greater than even the *Forward*.³⁰

This showed Dr. Roy’s larger vision for the press in India. His letters to leading lights in journalism like Rangaswami Iyenger, Editor, *Hindu*, S.A. Brelvy, Editor, *Bombay Chronicles*, Sri Cowasji Jahangir, C.Y. Chintmani of *Leader*, Allahabad and G.D. Birla (Proprietor, *Hindustan Times*) seeking their support for UPI are revealing.³¹ Also he convened a meeting of all major newspaper proprietors in his own house on 1 March 1934 to incorporate a Newspaper Proprietors’ Association. The invitees included, apart from Nationalist editors like Tushar Kati Ghose of *Statesman*, even Europeans like Houghes of *Madras Mail* as well as Khwaja Sir Nazimuddin from the *Star of India*. He had often to spend his own funds to keep the papers going and pay salaries of the staff month after month. Side by side, he would request leaders and scholars known to him to contribute articles, would sometimes hand over to the editor pieces that he himself had written to

29. NMML Archives, New Delhi, B.C. Roy Papers.

30. Ibid, NMML Archives, B.C. Roy papers.

31. Ibid.

appear as unsigned articles in the paper and give the editor his suggestions about topics which could be covered.

Truly, Bidhan became no less a journalist than Tilak, Motilal Nehru or Chittaranjan Das. One of his greatest achievements was organizing the United Press of India which remained the leading news agency in India for a whole generation. In August, 1933, B. Sengupta resigned his post as Calcutta Editor of the *Free Press Journal*, on account of his differences with his Chief, S. Sadanand. He approached Dr. Roy with the idea of organizing a news agency which could service the nationalist press. Bidhan readily agreed. He called a meeting of the editors and proprietors of Calcutta newspapers and the United Press of India was born. Dr. Roy became the Chairman of the Board of Directors and Sengupta its Managing Director and Managing Editor. But he was not an ornamental figurehead. He took a leading role in formulating the Articles of Association and Service rules in selling shares and enlisting subscribers and used his personal influence to raise finances for the new company. He made it a point to attend every meeting of the Board. When a proposal of collaboration came from an American News Agency, he urged some degree of caution in discussing the proposal. While the U.P.I. was concerned primarily with internal news service in India, it was also necessary to make special efforts to get correct news from outside as also send correct news about resurgent India to the world outside.

He took a lot of interest in the training of journalists and in building professionalism among them. He supported a proposal of the Indian Journalists' Association of Calcutta for the Calcutta University to start a Diploma Course in Journalism. Shortly thereafter he became Vice Chancellor and one of his first acts was to approve this proposal. But the actual introduction was delayed till 1951 on account of a variety of circumstances. Bidhan as Chief Minister was requested to inaugurate this Course. In a memorable address on this occasion, he said :

Remember, this country is passing through changing conditions. Sometimes, as my Prime Minister is often heard to say, the changes are dynamic in character. Things that happened yesterday do not hold good today

and things which seem to be true today may be absolutely outmoded tomorrow. Whenever any news or problem comes in, it is essential that every journalist, who desires to serve the people-and it is his duty to serve the people-should think about things himself. Here alone the freedom in journalism comes in. The journalist must be free to think in his own way. It does not matter what are the political considerations or ideas. He must spread ideas if he feels convinced that his ideal is correct; Otherwise if he writes according to the occasion or according to political considerations or to increase the sale of the paper, he has missed his function. I am anxious that journalists taught in this school should understand the very fundamental proposition that I have put forward here. In order to do so, it is essential that every journalist should attempt to act on liberty.³²

He retained his interest in the profession of journalism and the community of journalists throughout his carrer, practically till the last day of his life. He was affectionate personally to many of the journalists. Some of them are storehouses of information and anecdotes about this many-splendoured personality. While leaving his office in Writers' Building, he would often walk into the Press Corner and chat with the media persons not only on current topics, but also their personal problems including health. No wonder, he was one national leader who generally had a friendly press.

32. Thomas op cit p. 179.

A Hesitant Leader

It will always remain a mystery as to when Dr. Roy joined the Congress, or even whether he at all formally joined the great umbrella party, which provided leadership to diversified groups in the struggle for freedom. Surely, he became a staunch nationalist as a student in Calcutta and thereafter as a medical practitioner. We have already stated how he contested from the Barrackpur constituency as a Swarajya-supported independent candidate and thereafter sat with his party in the council becoming its deputy leader after the death of Chittaranjan. Chittaranjan, whom Bidhan had known socially and also as a doctor, played an important role in bringing him into active but part-time politics. Bidhan had attended the special Congress session in Calcutta in 1920 as a visitor, and was highly impressed with Chittaranjan, on his return from the Nagpur session as a convert to Gandhiji's programme, gave up his practice and his lifestyle, including his cigars and alcoholic drinks. He always recalled Das's great strength of character. He therefore became a staunch admirer of Chittaranjan, although this did not prevent him from saying 'No' to him as a matter of conscience when he asked him in 1923 to sign the Swarajya (Congress) pledge, and insisted on fighting Sir Surendra Nath as an independent candidate with Swarajya support. He became very close to Chittaranjan during the election campaign and thereafter in the council where he worked closely with the Swarajya (Congress) party without formally joining the party. "This is why" he said years later that he was so surprised "when anybody comes and tells me tht he cannot work for the country unless he gets a position in the Congress."³³ During the year and a half before his death Chittaranjan came to rely on Bidhan not only as his personal physician but also as a political associate, although he was not strictly a party man, and gave him tricky and delicate political assignments on his behalf on several

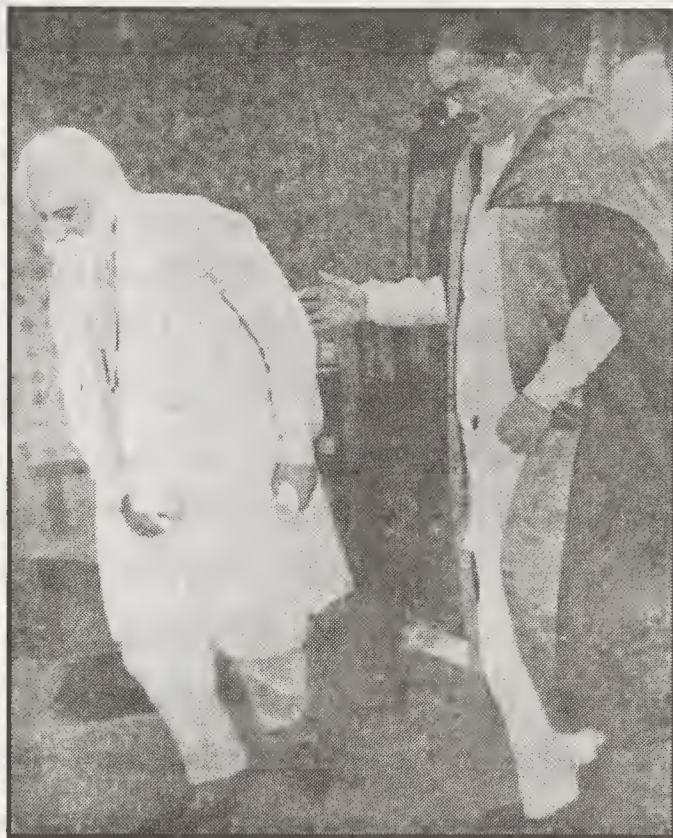
33. Thomas, K.P., op. cit p. 123.

occasions. He also made Bidhan trustee and secretary of a Village Reorganization Board with some funds he had collected for improving agriculture, education and medical facilities in rural Bengal.

Chittaranjan's dependence on Bidhan grew as his health was failing. In January 1925 when there was uncertainty as to whether his illness would permit him to attend a crucial meeting of the legislature which was to take up the question of restoring the salaries of ministers which had been voted down during the budget session, Das insisted on Dr. Roy himself taking him to the session on a wheelchair. After Chittaranjan delivered a forceful speech turning the scales against the treasury benches and ensuring the victory of the opposition, Bidhan took him back home. Chittaranjan also confided to Bidhan the correspondence he was having with Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State for India in the British Government, on the future constitutional set-up for India, and told him that he would suggest Bidhan as a Minister in the Government of India in case Birkenhead agreed to his proposals which he had already outlined at the Faridpur Provincial Conference. Unfortunately, Chittaranjan passed away on 16 June 1925 at Darjeeling nipping in the bud not only the negotiations he was having with Birkenhead which might have, if successful, changed the course of history but also the glorious phase of Hindu-Muslim amity that he had been able to bring about through his Bengal Pact of 1923.

Bidhan Roy was away at Shillong at that time. He rushed to Calcutta on hearing this news. It was when he went to Chittaranjan's house to offer his condolence to Basanti Devi that he met Gandhiji who was sitting there. They had met once before in the house of Maharaja of Kasimbazar, but it was a casual meeting not having made much mark on either. It was when they met each other at Deshbandhu Chittaranjan's house that a lasting lifelong friendship was formed. Seeing Bidhan, Basanti Devi burst into tears and said that she would not have lost Deshbandhu if Bidhan had been present at Darjeeling at the time of his illness. Thereafter she introduced Bidhan to Gandhiji. And there arose, as Bidhan would recollect later on "an instantaneous feeling of kinship between Gandhiji and myself which nothing could lessen during the ensuing 23 years". Gandhiji's action in making Dr. Roy the Secretary of Chittaranjan Memorial Trust and in finalizing in discussion with Bidhan

the plan to set up the Chittaranjan Seva Sadan to perpetuate Deshbandhu's memory was the first indication of the deep confidence he had in Dr. Roy's ability and devotion. He appealed to the nation for funds, and funds poured in generously. Dr. B.C. Roy took a photograph of Chittaranjan's dead body and took it to Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore at Shantiniketan, whom he already knew well. He told Gurudev "Please write something on this picture so that it lives in vision and perpetuates his memory". Rabindranath Tagore jokingly



With Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore

told Bidhan "Dr. is it prescription writing?", but scribbled the following poem on the picture "on your birth you brought a soul which knew no death. On your death you gifted it away"³⁴

These words became oft-quoted and millions of copies of the photograph with Tagore's scribbled words were sold. The amount was contributed to the Chittaranjan Seva Sadan Fund. Gandhiji could not trust any one else to manage these funds properly and use them for the purpose for which they were meant. Now Bidhan's position as a top-ranking Congress leader was firmly established.

34. Enechhile Sathe Kore Mrithyuheen Pran Marane takai tumi Kore gehe dan (In Bengali).

Congress, both in Bengal and at the national level, was riven by rampant groupism. There was the deep rivalry between the pro-changers and the no-changers often descending to personal levels. Bengal Congress was affected by the bitter personal tussle between J.M. Sengupta and Subhas Bose, although Bose was arrested soon and detained for a long time. Bidhan soon made his mark as a peacemaker and troubleshooter, and as a person with considerable managerial skill and organizing ability. In Subhash's absence both the pro-changers and the hardliners started looking towards Bidhan for guidance. On the other hand, he had good personal equation with both Gandhiji and his trusted lieutenant in Bengal, J.M. Sengupta. In December 1928, he was offered the position of General Secretaryship of the Reception Committee at the annual Congress session in Calcutta, a recognition of both his administrative skill and his moderating role. This Calcutta session in 1928 was a memorable show with Subhash as General-officer-Commanding of the khaki clad volunteer corps, with an impressive exhibition organized under the management of Nalini Ranjan Sarkar and with J.M. Sengupta as Chairman and Dr. B.C. Roy as General Secretary of the Reception Committee. The main burden of organizing this session fell on Dr. Roy's shoulders and he gave an excellent account of himself showing his skill both in organization and fund-raising. Bidhan was elected to the All India Congress Committee in 1928 and in 1929.

By keeping himself aloof from group rivalries rampant in the Congress, he projected his role as a peacemaker and mediator. But in popular perception he came to be identified as one among the so-called big five of Bengal Congress politics, the other four being Sarat Chandra Bose, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, Tulsi Charan Goswami and Nirmal Chandra Chunder. Together they formed for a decade or so a kind of brains-trust for the dominant Swarajya group in the Congress Party in the province.

Next year, the historic Lahore Congress (December 1929) saw two parallel sets of confrontation. On the one hand, there was the tussle between the two factions in the Bengal Congress, the Subhashists and the followers of J.M. Sengupta. On the other hand, at the All-India level, there was the clash between the moderate leadership and the

storm-troopers led by Subhash. Both conflicts came in the open. Bidhan was once again called upon to exercise his peacemaker's role, not once but several times, sometimes sitting through nights to bring the conflicting groups to the negotiating table and eventually forging compromise solutions. The Lahore Congress where Jawarharlal Nehru took over the presidency, adopted the Full Independence or Swaraj Resolution and authorized the AICC to launch a Civil Disobedience Movement calling upon Congressmen to resign from membership of legislatures and Government committees. Bidhan was one of the 34 members from Bengal, the largest number in a province, who resigned from the Legislative Council. Soon the Working Committee decided to observe 26 January as the Purna Swaraj Day. This was observed all over India. Bidhan was given the honour of hoisting the national flag at the BPCC office in Calcutta on the first Independence in 1930. On 21 March 1930 the AICC meeting at Ahmedabad finalized the launching of the Civil Disobedience Movement. This started with Gandhiji himself with 75 ashramites trekking to the seashore at Dandi in Gujarat and breaking the Salt Law by making salt. Repression, already on, was now unleashed in full force with the *en masse* arrest of all Congress leaders of consequence.

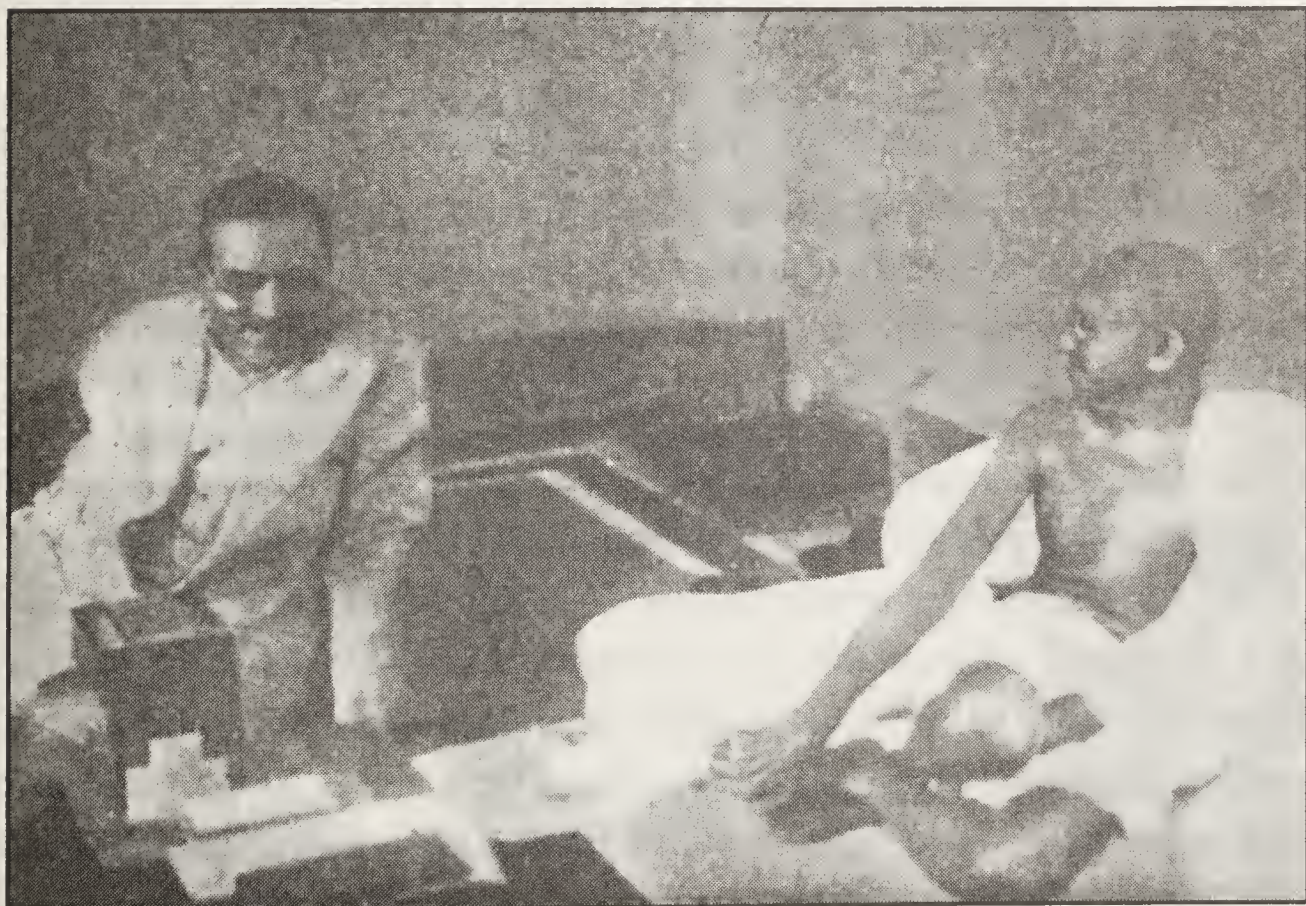
Bidhan was unofficially put in charge of Congress affairs in Bengal, and he was also nominated as a member of the Congress Working Committee by the substitute Congress President, Pandit Motilal Nehru. Thus for some time he carried on the affairs of not only the Bengal Congress but also of the All-India Congress, now an illegal organization. He did it with great finesse, literally expecting to be led into the prison everyday. For at least six months, he directed the Civil Disobedience Movement in Bengal. Thousands of men and women, young and old, violated laws and courted imprisonment in Bengal. As, one after another, the successive substitute Presidents - Motilal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Dr. M.A. Ansari - were being taken under detention, the Working Committee with Dr. B.C. Roy as a leading member, met regularly and passed important resolutions, such as condemnation of the notorious Press Ordinance, launching of no-tax campaign, appealing to Indians in military and police forces not to attack unarmed Satyagrahis in Peshawar in April, 1930.

Eventually his own arrest came on 26 August 1930 in Delhi when the Congress Working Committee itself meeting at Delhi at that time was declared illegal. Along with the Congress President, Dr. Ansari, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Vithalbhai Patel and others, he was tried in Delhi and sentenced to six months simple imprisonment. After ten days, the Superintendent of Police himself drove Dr. B.C. Roy in a car to the railway station and put him in a first class compartment of a train to Calcutta. He received a great ovation, although in custody, at Howrah station. He was taken to Alipore Central Jail where he found Subhash Bose, J.M. Sengupta, Kiran Sankar Roy and Prof. Nripendra Nath Banerjee in adjacent cells. Thus it was good-humoured camaraderie all over again. Within a few days, the Jail Superintendent, Major Patney asked him to take charge of the 120-bed jail hospital. Half of the 2500 convicts were political prisoners. So once again he returned to his routine life as a doctor, getting up at 5 a.m., taking a walk with his friends around the jail yard and spending the whole day with his patients from whom he learnt one lesson, viz., that 80 percent of the jail birds were not temperamentally criminal and could be salvaged by proper social welfare measures. In his perception, the jail authorities did not try to understand the minds of the prisoners. He often spent his own money to get special medicines from outside to save his patients. He was also able to persuade the Jail Superintendent to allow the use of these medicines in relaxation of the jail rules. The death rate among jail inmates came down very significantly during these six months. An appreciative prison administration reciprocated by allowing him to use his own bed and dress, and not locking him up after nightfall.³⁵ Also Dr. Roy was given six week's remission of his sentence for six months on the Superintendent's recommendation in terms of the Jail Code that a convict who saves the life of another convict gets remission for this act and that Dr. Roy had saved so many lives that he should be given maximum permissible remission for six months.

He was released in mid-January 1931. But within a few days, he was called to the bedside of ailing Pandit Motilal Nehru at Allahabad. He remained with Motilal Nehru until he breathed his last at Lucknow

35. Thomas. K.P. Op.cit. pp. 158-59.

on 29 January 1931. He personally supervised the making of a bamboo coffin for Motilal's body to be covered with the national flag provoking Gandhiji to equip, "Bidhan, you should have been an architect instead of a Doctor." He was also present at the cremation on the banks of the Jamuna at Allahabad. It was during these few weeks when both Gandhiji and Bidhan were together at dying Motilal's death bed that their friendship became closer than before. The vexed issue of the depressed sections, among the Hindus was becoming a major problem and the Schedule Castes, under the leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar demanded special protection in any future Constitution. Bidhan was emotionally opposed to all efforts to separate the Scheduled Castes from caste-Hindus and was always blunt and outspoken in his feelings. He asked Gandhiji why he had accepted the Gandhi-Irwin Pact which had in a way split the Hindu society. Gandhiji confessed, "I succumbed not to Lord Irwin, but to the honesty in him. I went against the directive of the Working Committee." Meanwhile, an award given by the British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald more or less promised separate electorate for the Scheduled Castes. This faced a lot of opposition in the country. Gandhiji started yet another fast unto death at Poona.



With Mahatma Gandhi

In between Dr. Roy's release from jail and Gandhiji's fast against Ramsay MacDonald Award in Poona, Gandhiji in consultation with G.D. Birla, the industrialist, who was President of All India Anti-Untouchability Board, had nominated Dr. B.C. Roy as the President of the Bengal Board. But Dr. Suresh Chandra Banerjee and Satish Das Gupta, two leading Gandhians in Bengal, expressed their opposition to this, an example of the low level to which factional squabbles in Bengal had sunk. To avoid embarrassment, Bidhan resigned, but thereafter withdrew his resignation on Gandhiji's request and assurance of support. Gandhi-Bidhan-Birla triangular correspondence on this issue makes interesting reading.³⁶ In 1933 Gandhiji undertook a 21-day fast at Pune. Now Gandhiji's fast temporarily eclipsed all other considerations, and saving his life became the most important issue. That was why Congress leaders fell for the Poona Pact between Gandhiji and Ambedkar, more or less on Ambedkar's terms. This Poona Pact conceded much more to Ambedkar than even the Ramsay MacDonald Award against which Gandhiji had gone on fast. Bidhan had been called on the third day of the fast and treated him throughout until he broke his fast on the 21st day amidst prayers. Bidhan noted that :

All around us we find instances when worry, anxiety or overwhelming sense of duty keep a person going for days together without food or rest. Only in such cases the overpowering emotion retains the physical function. In the case of Gandhiji, it was a deliberate resolve. He had a set purpose which had made him undertake the fast and he controlled his appetite and physical needs.

Dr. Roy returned to Calcutta, a disappointed man but with the knowledge "that in some persons mind controls all physical functions." But he was not happy about the way Gandhiji was conducting the Civil Disobedience Movement, his inconsistencies and shifts of ground from time to time. He had resigned his seat from the Council as a disciplined soldier, but was not happy about its wisdom. He wanted to call a conference of Congress leaders in Delhi in March 1934 to do a stocktaking. But a car accident in which his left leg was fractured made him non-functional for a

36. Thomas K.P. Ibid, pp. 165-173.

while. Dr. Roy met Gandhiji at Patna on 17 December 1934 and argued with him that a larger stocktaking conference was necessary. Gandhiji was not convinced. But Bidhan argued :

A surgeon uses a sharp knife to remove quickly and with one sweep a cancerous festering sore in the body, but if the weapon became blunt or its sharp ends became dull, the weapon instead of removing the cancer only irritated it. The Civil Disobedience Movement was such a weapon, but its utility was affected as the edge had become blunt as was evidenced by the slowing down of the movement amongst the masses.³⁷

Continuing, Bidhan further argued that “as a good General during war time would sometimes halt the march forward of the army, and even retreat in order to rearrange his forces and resharpen the weapons, the Congress General should do likewise.³⁸ This argument seemed to impress Gandhiji and then and there he approved of the earlier suggestion of Bidhan and Ansari to call a conference and to report to him the results of their deliberations. All India Swarajists Conference met at Dr. Ansari’s house in Delhi from 30 March to 3 April 1934 under the presidentship of Bhulabhai Desai and made the following decisions:³⁹

- (1) To revive the suspended Swarajya Party
- (2) To call upon those Congressmen who did not or could not take an active part in the Civil Disobedience Movement and yet wanted to carry on the fight inside the legislature to contest the ensuing General Assembly elections on the issue of proposed repression and reforms’ adumbrated by British Government.
- (3) To request the Congress to permit the Swarajya Party to be so revived without in any way affecting its own declared programme of civil disobedience.

These decisions were partially influenced by a grapevine report that Lord Willingdon was contemplating holding elections as a last

37. Thomas Ibid, p. 181.

38. Ibid.

39. NMML, New Delhi, Dr. B.C. Roy papers.

resort to break the impasse. There was also a Swarajyists' meeting at Ranchi on 2nd-3rd May 1934.⁴⁰ Among the leaders, who lent their support to the revival of the Swarajya Party were Chaudhury Khaliguzzaman of U.P. and T. Prakasam of Madras Presidency. Dr. Roy received congratulations from all over India for the initiative he took in reviving the Swarajya Party. An office of the All-India Swarajya Party functioned from Dr. Roy's house in 36 Wellington Street and "a Constitution of the Party was also drawn up. It stated that the object of the Swarajya Party is the attainment of Swarajya by the people of India by all legitimate and peaceful means".⁴¹ For some time around 1934-35 Bidhan also functioned as General Secretary of the All-India Parliamentary Board of the Indian National Congress. His house was his office address and he had to travel all over the country and carry on voluminous correspondence with the Provincial Congress Committees.⁴²

Surprisingly, Gandhiji also give his nod to these activities, decided to temporarily withdraw the Civil Disobedience Movement and even supported the efforts to revive the Swarajya Party. A meeting of the AICC held in July, 1934 resolved to suspend the Civil Disobedience Movement and accept the Council Entry Programme of the two doctors, Dr. Roy and Dr. Ansari. Gandhiji himself announced, "I admit that Dr. Ansari and Dr. Bidhan are people with honest convictions and they desire a change in our programmes. I will therefore withdraw the Civil Disobedience Movement so that the Council Entry Programme be given a chance." The only difference from the Motilal-Chittaranjan days a decade ago was that Congress candidates rather than Swarajya (Congress) candidates were to be put up. Dr. Roy along with Bhulabhai Desai became Secretary to the Election Committee with Dr. Ansari as the President. After nomination of candidates all over India had been completed, a spanner was thrown in the electioneering programme by Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya's decision to form a Congress Nationalist Party with himself as its President. Malaviya was strongly opposed to Gandhiji's Pune Pact with Ambedkar on the reservation of the seats for

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

scheduled castes. This was what Dr. Roy had⁴³ all along apprehended and that is why he had opposed Malaviya's induction as Vice-President of the Election Committee. He took up the matter with Gandhiji in Bombay and pointed to the possibility of Congress votes being split as a result of Malviya's move. That was Gandhiji's days of silence, and his answer in writing was "The Congress is too big an organization to be the plaything of any individual however big he might be. We must continue our election programme in spite of all odds." Bidhan got his answer. Bidhan, as always took his responsibility seriously. His correspondence with Bhulabhai Desai shows that he was even suggesting that Desai should approach Purushottam Das Thakurdas and other senior people in the Tatas to persuade the Tata Steel to make a handsome donation to the Congress Parliamentary Board and in return the Congress should mount pressure on the Government not to implement the Tariff Board report recommending a kind of imperial preference which would place Tata Steel in an unenviable position. He cited an example from 1923-24 when C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru had secured a big donation for the Swarajya Party from the TISCO and as a recompense had taken up with the Government of India the question of reimposition of protecting tariff over imported steel to help Indian Steel industry. "I do not find any reason why the premier political organization should not come in for a good share of the spoils if they are spoils at all."⁴⁴

During the disastrous Bihar earthquake of 1934 Dr. Roy jumped into relief work. In a letter to Dr. Rajendra Prasad he noted the "sensitivity of middle class families to go and take charity at the relief centres. It is necessary therefore that your men should go there with money and things and seek out the persons who need relief and give it to them."⁴⁵

Malaviya had resigned from the Parliamentary Board, and his party contested the election on the issue of Communal Award. In the election to the Central Assembly in 1934 many Bengal Congressmen preferred to contest for Malaviya's Congress Nationalist Party. The most notable case was Sarat Chandra Bose who was in detention but was elected.

43. NMML Archives, New Delhi, B.C. Roy Papers, Roy's letter to Desai dated 22nd August

44. Ibid.

45. op. cit. B.C. Roy Papers

Clearly there was a crack developing in the Big Five. Bidhan who had so far maintained a good relationship with the Bose brothers did not succeed in persuading Sarat Babu to stay with the Gandhi-led parents body. Another disjointed event occurred in October 1934 when Bidhan's name was proposed for election to the Presidentship of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee without his knowledge as a rival candidate to Subhash and he was in fact elected, a measure of the support base that he had. But by December Bidhan realized that his professional commitments, and in particular the need to go outside on professional calls would not permit him to give proper attention to his duties and responsibilities as President, BPCC. He therefore decided to resign from the Presidentship announcing in a public statement that profession and politics were both equally hard taskmasters and one could not serve both efficiently at the same time. Thus, after 1934-35, Bidhan left the centre stage of Congress politics and withdrew to the wings keeping himself on call whenever the Congress leadership needed him, but avoiding taking any direct responsibility.

On Sarat Babu's release early in 1935 the Big Five had a meeting, perhaps their last one to sort out their differences and work out their future programme of works. But they found that the difference of approach between Sarat Bose on the one hand and the four others including Bidhan on the other was substantial and irreconcilable. No common programme was therefore possible and they parted company although Bidhan tried his best to maintain equidistance to the extent possible. His state of mind was evident from the letter he wrote to his friend, Dr. MA Ansari on 8 April 1935 : "I do not desire to have anything to do with the Congress for some time. I would rather remain away from politics for a while and for the same reason I have no inclination to be on the Parliamentary Board."⁴⁶

Bengal Congress continued to be riven by several factions throughout 1935 and 1936. Bidhan was elected chairman of a committee consisting of four members from the two main opposing groups to select candidates for the provincial assembly election. The committee unanimously selected 200 candidates, but failed to select candidates for four seats. The BPCC met and approved the four selected by Bidhan.

46. NMML, Dr. B.C. Roy Papers

But Sarat Bose was unrelenting, and appealed to the Working Committee. The Working Committee tried a compromise solution and suggested two from each group. But Bidhan felt that this was unconstitutional and the verdict of the general body of the BPCC should be honoured. On this issue he resigned, and Sarat Bose, then, agreed to shoulder the entire responsibility of the election that year⁴⁷ under the Government of India Act, 1935.

In the elections to the Bengal Assembly in 1937, the Congress was returned as the largest party securing 59 seats with the Muslim League having got only 39 seats. A.K. Fazlul Huq's Krishak Prija Party opposing Muslim League candidates and receiving support from the Congress got 40 seats and assumed the king-makers' role. Huq offered coalition to the Congress first. Left to himself Dr. Roy would have agreed to it. Interestingly, Subhash Bose was of the same view. Bidhan had excellent personal equation with Fazlul Huq. He had even financially assisted Huq in the election campaign.⁴⁸ But Sarat Bose as also the Congress High Command did not favour this as this would lower the party's prestige and compromise its principles. Huq turned to the Muslim League and a KPP-League coalition government was formed under Huq's premiership. In retrospect this decision of the Congress must be viewed as a great blunder. It directly led to further communalization of Bengal politics and eventually to partition. History would have been different had the Congress accepted Fazlul Huq's offer. Huq soon joined the Muslim League and moved the Pakistan resolution in the League's Lahore session in 1940, although his honeymoon with the League was destined to be for a short while. When the Congress High command turned down the proposal for a KPP-Congress coalition and a KPP-Muslim League coalition was formed instead, Bidhan was disappointed and left the political centre-stage and withdrew to the ringside for a few years, one of those spells for which he was famous. His friend Nalini Ranjan Sarkar joined Huq's coalition government. In 1938, when there were some deputations from Barrabazar in Calcutta to Maulana Azad that Dr. Roy should contest for the vacancy in the Assembly caused by the resignation of Prabhudayal Himmatsingha in preference to ID Jalan,

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

who was supposed to fill the vacancy according to a private understanding, Dr. Roy rejected such overtures.⁴⁹

Throughout 1937 he concentrated on his practice which required him to travel all over the subcontinent. Yet he was elected President of the BPCC and member of the Congress Working Committee. Slowly Bidhan was acquiring a somewhat detached attitude to Congress politics playing some role in it, but not quite immersed in it. He confided to his biographer :

I can truthfully say that while I was all along taking my share in the deliberation of these committees, I have never had any ambition to occupy any position in the political party nor to boss it. If I hate anything in public life it is the creation of political sectors or groups for the sake of controlling political opinion. I am convinced that this universally practised political manicuring cannot lead to the greatest good of the greatest number, and abuses, nepotism and dishonesty follow, 'Honesty is the best policy' is as a maxim in politics as in other activities of life, if we are to restore politics to its proper sphere of usefulness.⁵⁰

Clearly, it was this realization which impelled him to withdraw again during the period from 1938 to 1946 from the centre stage politics in the Congress to the wings making only occasional entries as and when required or requested. Also, he shifted part of his interest from politics to civics i.e. the Calcutta Corporation and university education. His role as Vice-chancellor of the University will be dealt with in a subsequent chapter.

In 1938 Subhash Bose was elected Congress President with Gandhiji's support. In 1939 he was re-elected against Gandhiji's wishes and defeating Gandhiji's nominee, Pattabhi Sitaramayya. Gandhiji described it as "my own defeat" and did not cooperate with Subhash. This led to a vertical split in the party resulting in Subhash's resignation as also intense groupism among Bengal Congressmen between pro

49. Ibid.

50. Thomas, K.P. op. cit, p 189.

-Gandhians and pro-Subhasists. Gandhiji came to Sodepur, sent for Bidhan and requested Bidhan to take up membership of the Congress Working Committee. After a great deal of hesitation Bidhan agreed and thus ended his phase of equidistance, leaning towards Gandhiji. This exposed him to a lot of hostility, and even his Wellington Street house was attacked. Gandhiji asked Bidhan to reorganize the Congress in Bengal after the expulsion of the Bose brothers. But Dr. Roy chose to keep himself away from active Congress politics throughout 1939 and 1940. In 1939 when the Second World War broke out and the Congress decided to withdraw its Ministers from seven provinces and all Congress legislators in protest against the Viceroy dragging India to the war without her consent, two Working Committee members including Dr. Roy dissented. Bidhan felt this was an unrealistic decision and would only leave the playfield clear for the Muslim League. On this issue Bidhan wanted to resign from the Working Committee. He was temporarily overruled, but insisted on the non-inclusion of his name in the new Working Committee when Maulana Azad became the new President. Thus he was out of the Working Committee from 1940. In 1942 he engaged himself with Gandhiji's approval and at Government of India's request to help recruiting doctors for the Indian Army almost at a time when the Congress launched the Quit India movement. He was not arrested unlike any other front ranking Congress leader. On the contrary, he was given certain privileges by the Government.

Around the same time he was requested to contest for Aldermanship in the Calcutta Corporation in the vacancy caused by Netaji Subhash's continued detention. Bidhan, always seeking to balance things suggested that Sarat Chandra Bose should be the first choice. On Sarat Babu's refusal he agreed to offer himself as a candidate. But unexpectedly Sarat in detention had second thoughts and decided to be a candidate. Now there was pressure on Dr. Roy to withdraw. But he refused to do so as a matter of conscience. The election was held ironically with two foremost leaders of the erstwhile Big Five as rivals. Bidhan won with the majority of the Congress Councillors voting for him. But even afterwards he maintained good personal relationship with both Sarat Bose and Subhash Bose and was also their doctor in times of crisis.

Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University

If the medical profession was Dr. Roy's First Love, the University of Calcutta was his second. He became a member of the Senate, as already noted, in 1916 under Sri Ashutosh's influence. We have already noted how he took the initiative in the senate passing a resolution criticizing Sir P.C. Mitter, one of its members condemning the University in the Council for its "criminal thoughtlessness," and how the matter led to a confrontation between the University and the Bengal Legislative Council. It was largely in trying to assert and safeguard the University's independence that he got himself elevated to the Bengal Legislative Council. He was elected President of the Board of Accounts of the University in 1924 and remained so for 11 years, an indication of the great trust and confidence the elderly University community had in him. He was elected to the University's Syndicate in 1931. Around the same time after he had resigned his Barrackpore seat in the Assembly as a disciplined Congressman, in pursuance of Gandhiji's Civil Disobedience appeal but against his wishes, he was reelected to the Assembly from the Calcutta University Graduates constituency. The capping stone was his appointment as Vice Chancellor of the University in 1941. This was at a time when Bidhan was getting a bit aloof from the day-to-day Congress politics and had decided to concentrate on education and philanthropic activities and on his medical practice while retaining a loose connection with the Congress.

No Vice-Chancellor could have assumed this charge in worse times. The World War was in its full fury. Burma had fallen and Bengal was now exposed to the war through Japanese bombardment and threats of invasion. Bidhan had to do a great deal of crisis management, shifting the Controller of Examination office to Berhampore, constructing air-raid shelters in schools and colleges, organizing shifts in schools, colleges and the University classes so as to optimize scarce resources and also

to avoid evening hours when air-raids were likely to occur and even selling rice at concessional rates to the University employees. From 1942 there was an exodus of people from Calcutta to moffusil centres and the University had to organize new examination centres, take question papers to those centres and collect answer scripts. Bidhan rose to the occasion. His innovativeness was seen in his piloting the Institute of Social Welfare in 1942 which along with labour welfare courses started courses in business management, the first Institute in India to do so at a time when management was unknown as an academic subject. This is one more illustration of how farsighted he was. Dr. Roy remained Chairman at the Institute till his death and had the satisfaction to inaugurate the Institute's building in 1960. Another pioneering venture was the Jute Technology Institute for which he persuaded the jute barons to contribute Rs.9 lakh for constructing its building on the University's land at Ballygunge, Circular Road and setting up the Institute there. He acknowledged the Industry's contribution when he admitted that "the enthusiasm of the industry itself has been very gratifying." Here was a rare example of University-Industry cooperation. His unconventional attitude was illustrated when the Government of India approached the Vice-Chancellor, Calcutta University, to train students wanting to join the fledgling Indian Air Force as pilots or ground engineers. After all, Dr. Roy was a Congress Leader although for reasons of his own he did not take part in the ongoing Quit India Movement of the Congress. But the practical instinct in him felt that here was a great opportunity to inculcate the spirit of discipline among the students through military training, and this offer should be grasped. Also, there was considerable enthusiasm among the students. The Vice-Chancellor threw open a shed in the University College of Science for holding training classes for which Air Force officers from Delhi used to come. Many of the trainees were actually recruited in the IAF on completion of their training. Bidhan was proud that the Calcutta University students were not lagging behind others in this respect.

Side by side, Dr. Roy introduced condensed courses in medicine to give licensed doctors a change to obtain their M.B. Degrees, and hundreds of doctors from all over India took advantage of his opportunity. Indeed, he showed a penchant for opening new technological and medical institutes. He also took interest in opening courses

of study in fine arts. A grateful University conferred on him in 1944 the degree Doctor of Science (*honoris causa*). Again, it was the University Graduates Constituency which returned him to the West Bengal Assembly after Independence to become the Chief Minister. He took the initiative in doing away with the antiquated practice of the University having part-time honorary Vice-Chancellor and appointing full-time salaried Vice-Chancellors. He also took care to select exceptionally competent Vice-Chancellors like Sir J.C. Ghosh. He took special interest in the centenary celebrations of the Calcutta University in 1957.

Uncertain Years

During this period Dr. Roy maintained a certain aloofness. In the great fight between Gandhiji and Subhash he generally remained neutral, retaining his personal friendship as a doctor to his patient with both. He concentrated on his medical practice and on social and philanthropic activities while maintaining a minimal relationship with the Congress. He also took a lot of interest in Calcutta Corporation and retained his long time interest in the University of Calcutta. When Burma (Myanmar) fell to the advancing Japanese army, there was a big rush of Indian evacuees to Assam through the overland route. At the request of Congress President, Maulana Azad, Dr. Roy organized a Congress medical mission to visit Assam to render medical relief to the distressed Burmese evacuees. Funds were collected by him from people as different as Lady Linlithgow, the Maharaja of Kapurthala and Maulana Azad showing apolitical approach.⁵¹ The mission left for Assam on 5 May 1942 and treated 22,663 evacuee patients. Likewise, he also assisted the relief effort during the catastrophic Bengal Famine of 1943 when around 5 million people perished.

Gandhiji's Fast in Pune, 1943

Dr. Roy did not play any active role in the Quit India Movement that Gandhiji and the Congress leadership started on 9 August 1942, nor did he oppose it. He was not arrested by the British Raj and was invariably called upon to treat Gandhiji, as a physician when in 1943 Gandhiji while in detention at the Agha Khan Palace in Pune went on a fast for 21 days. Gandhiji on a request from the jail authorities suggested the name of Dr. Roy to attend on him. But the Government asked Dr. Roy to accept three conditions. Bidhan agreed to two of the conditions imposed by the Government, viz., he would only issue a daily bulletin regarding Gandhiji's health with the Government's approval, and that he would not make use of

51. B.C. Roy Papers in NMML, New Delhi.

any information he may gather at the Agha Khan Palace for any political propaganda. But he refused to accept the third condition that he should reside in the Agha Khan Palace and made the Government agree to this. He travelled to Pune at his own expense, and stayed with friends for three weeks visiting Gandhiji every day. There was a lot of drama attached to this fast when Gandhiji's condition deteriorated and he was feared to be dying on the 13th day. That night, the Government put the entire police and military force on a nationwide alert fearing all-round violence when the rumour about Gandhiji's death spread out. The other doctors of the panel Gen. Candy, Col. Shaw, Col., Bhandari and the Surgeon General Bombay, had given up all hope and suggested forced injection of glucose. Bidhan strongly opposed this idea and declared that in that event he would consider himself no longer bound by the conditions he had accepted and declare to the world that Gandhiji had died on account of the mental shock caused by forced glucose injection inspite of Dr. B.C. Roy's warning. He prescribed an unconventional remedy and persuaded Gandhiji to drink four ounces of sweet lime-juice. After drinking the lime juice Gandhiji's condition improved dramatically and Bidhan left the Agha Khan Palace only at 9 p.m. A few days later, Bidhan said at the Pune Medical College : "Gandhiji had fooled the Government, and death himself."⁵² A year later he had to again examine Gandhiji, still in detention at the request of the Secretary of State for India. Gandhiji was suffering from Anteglostomiasis, and was released on the basis of Dr. Roy's report. He went to Juhu, and Bidhan to Calcutta. He returned to Juhu with the latest imported drugs for Ancylostomiasis and persuaded Gandhiji to take it despite his strong aversion to western medicines. He was cured.

With Gandhiji's approval, Bidhan also for a while devoted himself to the task of improving the quality of Indian doctors being recruited for military service. He also played a role in relief efforts in course of terrible Bengal Famine of 1943. As he was, for all practical purposes, the only front-ranking Congress leader left out of the prison, he did assume a certain informal role in relation to doing a housekeeping job in the banned party, but it was minimal and informal, with the tacit

52. Thomas, op cit. p 202.

consent of both the Congress leadership and the Government. Nobody ever accused him of betraying the Congress or playing a pro-Government role.

Medical Mission to China and Malaya

During the year 1945-46, Dr. Roy, disgusted with the Congress-Muslim League politics and keeping himself aloof from it except as a doctor, took a lot of interest in the Medical Missions sent out from India at the initiative of the Congress to China and Malaya. His contact with the China Medical Mission of which Dr. Atal was in charge was indirect. He only arranged procuring some appliances and equipment and a few doctors, like Dr. Debesh Mukherjee, who was with the Chinese 8th route army. He was assisted by Subhash's associate, Ashrufuddin Ahmad Chowdhury, who was Secretary to the Bengal Committee at that time.⁵³ But he assumed direct charge of the Mission of Malaya at the request of Jawaharlal Nehru who had returned from a visit to that country in December, 1945 and felt that the fast deteriorating health conditions in Malaya called for a helping hand from non-official India immediately. Dr. Roy rose to the occasion arranging funds, purchasing medicines and equipment on a large scale, selecting personnel and arranging for their transport from Calcutta to different centres in Malaya to help suffering humanity. His proverbial efficiency was also seen in the fact that the Mission could leave by January, 1946, i.e., in about a month. The Mission stayed in Malaya till the beginning of July and was a resounding success. It returned to Calcutta with 39 persons on the evening of the 15th August, a day before Muslim League's Direct Action Day and the great Calcutta killings which were to change the history of India decisively. The Mission left a lot of its stores behind. Dr. Roy had to arrange for their disposal. At the request of the people of Malaya conveyed through Nehru, he agreed to let them have the use of an ambulance.⁵⁴ Thus during these war years Dr. Roy scrupulously avoided taking an active role in the Stafford Cripps Mission negotiations of 1942 or the post-war Cabinet Mission's (Pathic Lowrence, Stafford Cripps and A.V. Alexander) discussion with the Indian political leaders at Shimla. His personal relations with Jinnah were cordial and Jinnah always respected Dr. Roy

53. B.C. Roy Papers in NMML, New Delhi.

54. NMML-B.C. Roy Papers.

as an eminent doctor and as a politician with sober views. But he never agreed with Jinnah's views on Muslims being a separate nation from the Hindus and abhorred the very idea of partition or the Congress even agreeing to discuss it. Hence, he kept himself aloof from the political arena during the post-war years as he had done during the war years. The general elections of 1946 returned the Muslim League led by Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy to power in Bengal and the events moved fast thereafter leading to partition and independence.

He was away at Shillong in August 1946 when the Muslim League's Direct Action Day communal riots burst upon Calcutta on the 16th. His house at Wellington Square became a target of attack by Muslim League hoodlums and was subjected to large scale looting. Most of his personal belongings as well as a whole lot of stocks of various articles kept by the Medical Mission to Malaya were ransacked and taken away. The Mission had returned from Malaya on 15 August and stored their equipment and baggage in Dr. Roy's house. The rioters took whatever they could including a big sword presented by the Chinese in Malaya and set fire to other boxes throwing their contents on the road. On receipt of this news, he hastened to Calcutta. It took three days, the minimum time taken in those days to journey by train from Gauwahati to Calcutta. It was this awareness of the long time taken on this journey which made him think of air journey, and some time later was born Airways India of which he became Chairman. This was very much like the situation when, years earlier on his first visit to Shillong, he saw that such a beautiful hill station had no electricity and straightaway conceived of a hydel power station for Shillong, his pioneering entrepreneurial venture which gave him rich industrial experience that was to come in handy when as Chief Minister, of West Bengal, he had to pioneer so many industrial ventures.

The train carrying him could not proceed up to Sealdah on account of disturbed conditions and he had to get off at Barrackpore and contacted the local SDO for assistance to journey up to his home. By a coincidence, the District Magistrate of 24 Paraganas, an Englishman, happened to be there on a visit. But he bluntly told Dr. Roy that he could not arrange for the passage of anyone to Calcutta unless he was European or a Government servant. But luckily, the Superintendent of Police, a

Bengalee, whom Dr. Roy had treated offered to reach him to Calcutta in his own vehicle despite what the D.M. had said. He was driven to Calcutta through a circuitous route by the SP of 24 Paraganas along with a lady and a relation of Dr. Roy, first to the SP's home at Alipore and then to his cousin's house at Mayfair. Even then, he could not approach his own home. Although, after several days of rampage his brother, on approaching the Governor of Bengal, had succeeded in sending a police force which had driven away the rioters from his house, it was still at the heart of riot-torn area, and it was not safe for him to go there. He had to remain for a month and a half with his friends elsewhere in the city before he could venture to return to Wellington Square, and literally renovate and restore his house to what it was before. But during the period, he devoted himself to providing relief, medical or otherwise to the riot victims often risking his own life. Cremating the decomposed bodies was itself a great task. On a particular day, he had to cremate about 1000 bodies with the help of volunteers. He confessed to his biographer that he had never seen death in such conditions. He also spent a lot of time ensuring the safety of the students, hostels and boarding houses located in disturbed areas where the hoodlums were roaming around with open swords. He did not take any role in the tortuous negotiations leading to the decision to divide India and implement the partition scheme. No doubt, he was bitterly sad about the way the communal divide was getting worse and worse through Calcutta, Noakhali, Bihar and Punjab riots, but since events had gone beyond the control of the leadership, and he could not make any contribution to arrest the inevitable march of events towards partition, he preferred to keep aloof.

Independence and After

With Independence coming nearer and nearer, Nehru and the Congress leadership wanted to rope Bidhan in and offer him an important political position from which he could once again fulfil a national political role. On 2 June 1947, a day before the announcement of Mountbatten's plan for the partition of India, Bidhan, extremely sad that the country was being partitioned against the wishes of so many, left for Europe and U.S.A. with Gandhiji's permission. Soon after he reached the U.S.A. in July 1947, he was offered Governorship of United Provinces (renamed Uttar Pradesh). Bidhan replied that he was going to stay in U.S.A. for treatment of his eyes and that this would keep him out of the country for several months. But he was unable to say 'No' to Nehru's wishes, and informed him that he could therefore assume charge only on his return. But at the same time he indicated that he would not like to remain Governor for long, and would seek to return to a politically active role as soon as possible. Nehru insisted on his becoming Governor of Uttar Pradesh and this was also approved by King George VI in London. Bidhan was to be abroad till December 1947. Meanwhile Dr. Profulla Chandra Ghosh had taken over as West Bengal's first Prime Minister or Premier as was the more popular nomenclature till India's new Constitution changed the name to Chief Minister in 1950. On his return on 1st November 1947 Dr. Roy found "much to my joy that Mrs. Sarojini Naidu who was appointed as a stop-gap Governor of U.P. was quite happy in her new position, and performed her duties very well.*" This was a good excuse for Dr. Roy to get out of his obligation. He therefore informed Jawaharlal Nehru that he had definitely decided to resign from his post of Governor. Hearing of Bidhan's resignation from the post of Governorship of Uttar Pradesh, Gandhiji told him jokingly "now that you have declined the offer of

*. Thomas K.P. - Dr. B.C. Roy 1955, page 222.

Governorship, I cannot any longer call you Your Excellency, as I was hoping to.”

Dr. B.C. Roy replied with a smile “Gandhiji I shall give a better substitute. I am Roy. From that you can call me Royal. Also, I am much higher (taller) than others. So if you call me Royal Highness, it will quite justified.”

But as King George VI had signed Dr. B.C. Roy’s appointment as Governor of U.P. a formal proposal had to go to him to cancel his order and sign a new order appointing Smt. Sarojini Naidu as the new Governor of U.P. This naturally took some time. In December 1947 Bidhan went to Delhi and met his old friend, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee who had, on Nehru’s request, taken over as Central Minister for Industry and Supply. Shyama Prasad told him that he had not till then resigned his seat in the West Bengal Assembly from the Calcutta University registered graduates constituency and requested Bidhan to take that seat when he resigned. Dr. Roy agreed gracefully, but subject to the condition that if ever Shyama Prasad would return to Bengal politics on grounds of his health, Bidhan would vacate the seat for him. This is a measure of the friendship that prevailed among political leaders those days in spite of their political differences. This also illustrates how the great doctor tried to keep his friendly personal equation with every other leader intact. It was at this time that Dr. Roy was requested by some West Bengal Congress leaders to offer himself for Premiership of the Province. Whether Bidhan nourished a secret ambition to lead West Bengal politically remains a mystery. But clearly, he had let it be known that he wished to return to active politics. Incidentally after his election to the Assembly, he had declined a request from Dr. Ghosh to join his Cabinet and requested for association with the Development Board, if any, as a non-official member.

Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh had never been comfortable in his seat. A well-meaning Gandhian, he was unable to pull various political groups together. Besides, his main base of operation was in East Bengal which had now been detached from West Bengal where he had to contend against a lot of unfamiliarity. Also, he was uncompromising on every issue to the point of being unrealistic. Inevitably, within a few months, there was opposition to his leadership from the majority of the Congress MLAs.

Group rivalry, always rampant in the Bengal Congress, was no less so even in the truncated West Bengal. From the time the West Bengal Legislative Assembly first met in November 1947 for a brief session and thereafter in January 1948, it became difficult for P.C. Ghosh to hold the warring groups together. Things were further complicated by two other factors, the snowballing influx of refugees from across the border, and secondly, the subversive activities of the underground Communist and pseudo-Communist elements from time to time seeking expression in labour unrest or student movements. The introduction of the West Bengal Security Bill in the Assembly by Dr. Ghosh's government made him unpopular. The fact that Dr. Ghosh had to resort to strong police action against both workers and students led to further loss of popularity. On 10 December 1948 there had to be police firing on an unruly mob violating an order under Section 144 Cr.P.C. near the Raj Bhawan resulting in one death. This, according to Dr. Ghosh's statement on the floor of the Assembly, "was a well-laid conspiracy to discredit the Government and to capture power by violence." The police action was opposed by the Congress Party, which decided not to proceed with the Security Bill. Both Prime Minister Nehru and the Union Home Minister, Vallabhbhai Patel, visited Calcutta to assuage feelings and to unite the Congressmen. The Security Bill was passed on 4 January 1948 but after creating a lot of discontent in the party. It was against this background that the majority of the Congress MLAs signed a resolution expressing their lack of confidence in Dr. Ghosh's leadership and their support for the dynamic leadership of Dr. Bidhan Roy.

Whether Bidhan was aware of this move is not certain. There is no evidence that he was. But, clearly, he could not say 'No' when Dr. Ghosh was compelled to resign, and there was pressure on him to accept Premiership. The followers of Dr. Ghosh always accused him of masterminding the political change under pressure from big business and New Delhi. Maybe that, as on so many occasions in his life, he did not strive for Chief Ministership, but was willing to accept this responsibility if and when it was offered to him. There was also another theory of Gandhiji's role in the coup. On the eve of the general election of 1957 Dr. P.C. Ghosh, then in the opposition, hinted at pressure from big business as a reason for his ouster in 1948. He released a photostat copy of a sensational letter in Hindi written to him by Mahatma Gandhi on

the eve of his election in 1947 as the leader of the Congress Legislature Party in West Bengal. It said, among other things, that “Sardar has sent a message that there should be a Marwari in your Cabinet, Badridas Goenka, or Debi Prasad Khaitan. It appears to me that it is proper to do it and not proper not to do it.” Dr. Ghosh was criticized by Atulya Ghosh and others for publishing this letter which Gandhiji himself had subsequently withdrawn to score a political point against Dr. Roy. An interesting piece of information is provided by one of Dr. Roy’s officials in his memoirs. It traces the matter to a dinner party that Dr. Roy attended in Prime Minister Nehru’s house in New Delhi while returning from the U.S.A. This was in honour of Lord and Lady Mountbatten. The Governor-General was highly impressed with Dr. Roy with whom he had a discussion on the problems that the partition had created especially for Bengal. He suggested to Nehru that instead of wasting Dr. Roy as Governor of U.P. he should be appointed as the Premier of problem-ridden West Bengal.* That idea struck Nehru and he worked on it thereafter. Anyway on 12 January Dr. Roy, about to catch the plane for Delhi to attend to Mahatma Gandhi who had started a fast, the last in his life, received a phone call from Dr. P.C. Ghosh. He told Bidhan about the Congress Legislature Party’s resolution and requested him to form a new Cabinet under him forthwith. Dr. Roy told that he was unaware of any such development, and that in any case he was going to Delhi to attend on Gandhiji who had gone on a fast and was, therefore, not able to act on Dr. Ghosh’s request. He left for Delhi and was with Gandhiji until he broke his fast on 18 January. Gandhiji advised Dr. Roy to accept the position offered to him as the Congress MLAs needed him, and give West Bengal “a first class Ministry” choosing people on consideration of ability and merit rather than party membership. Dr. Roy agreed and, on his return to Calcutta, conveyed his willingness to Dr. Ghosh. He also asked for a free hand in choosing his Ministers, and both the Pradesh Congress Committee and the Congress Legislature Party agreed. Thus there began a new phase, the most glorious one, in the life of Dr. Roy, then sixty five years of age.

As summed up by one of his associates in his memoirs: The story of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy is the story of the development of West

*. Chakraborty S. My Years with Dr. B.C. Roy pages 6-7.

Bengal in all its spheres of activity. It is a fascinating era of transformation of the vivisected province of West Bengal into a vibrant, progressive and industrially advanced State of the country, from darkness to light, frustration to hope and confidence. It began at 9.15 a.m. of the 23rd day of January, 1948 and ended at 12 noon of the 1st of July, 1962- a long stretch of fourteen years of untiring fight of dynamic person and his final emergence as victor.¹

1. Ibid p. 1.

Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Stabilization

On 23 January 1948, when the nation was celebrating Netaji Subhash's birthday, Bidhan Chandra Roy's cabinet was sworn in by Governor-General C. Rajagopalachari. This was the crowning achievement in a career where he had not only become the leader of the medical profession in India, but had got the triple crown of the Mayor of Calcutta, the Vice Chancellor, Calcutta University and a member of the Congress Working Committee at a comparatively young age. All the positions had come to him without his asking for them. Few leaders in the history of India had achieved such honoured positions in diversified fields of activities. But all this was only a prelude to the next fifteen glorious years of packed achievements. Others who were sworn in were his old friends, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, an industrialist who had been Finance Minister in Fazlul Huq's Ministry and later on a member of Viceroy's Executive Council, Harendra Nath Roychowdhury, Nikunja Maity, Bimal Chandra Sinha, Bhupati Mazumdar, Prafulla Chandra Sen, Niharendu Dutt Mazumdar, Mohini Burman, Kalipada Mukherjee, Jadavendra Nath Panja and Hem Chandra Naskar. Bidhan also invited Dr. P.C.Ghosh to be a Minister in his Cabinet but the latter declined and accused the new Ministry of a probing business bias contrary to the Congress's proclaimed socialism. The new Chief Minister after the swearing-in ceremony drove straight to the Writers Building.

Mahatma Gandhi's Martyrdom

Bidhan assumed helmsmanship in West Bengal when conditions had deteriorated to the worst possible level. The combined impact of the war, the 1943 famine, the chronic communal disturbances of 1946-47, and the partition with the disruption it had caused and the refugee problem it had created was to make conditions in the new truncated

province chaotic and unmanageable. Also there was chronic food problem and scarcity of clothing and nearly every article of daily use by the common people. Even before Dr. Roy could settle down in the Chief Minister's chair, Mahatma Gandhi's life was cut short on 30 January, 1948 by the bullets of a fanatic. This shocked the whole nation. It was also a personal attachment to Gandhiji during three decades of association. After Gandhiji's death he had to take strong measures to prevent outbreak of violence. Communal bodies like the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), the Muslim National Guard and the Khaksars had to be declared illegal. Elaborate police arrangements had to be made. On the occasion of the immersion of the Mahatma's ashes in the Bhagirathi river at Barrackpore, nearly one million people were present to listen to Dr. Roy. In a letter to the Prime Minister Bidhan said:

Today we observed in great solemnity the immersion ceremony in Bengal. It was for me personally a very sad day. I wish the occasion of the gathering were for something different, and yet out of the ashes will, I believe, arise forces which will spread the gospel of Gandhiji far and wide. I feel convinced that the observance by ten lakh people and more on the banks of the Ganges near Barrackpore- which will in future be called Gandhi Ghat- will be the beginning of a great future for all of us. I heard over the radio the events that took place in Allahabad, and I am perfectly sure that all of us had been together in spirit in paying homage to the departed. Perhaps, I have made a mistake in saying that he is departed. Gandhiji is with us and so far as Old Guards are concerned, I feel certain he will go on operating through us as long as we are able to serve the people.⁵⁵

I agree with you in your observation contained in the letter of 5th February that there are people in this country who have adopted the method of political assassination in India to gain political ends. Even in the solemn observances of today we could notice a great competition for utilising an

55. Chakraborty, S. My Years with Dr. B.C. Roy, Calcutta, 1928, p. 17.

occasion like this for party or group purposes. While demanding freedom for the people there are some who wish to seize power by murder and violence in order to suppress freedom of others. Therefore, the West Bengal Government joins with you in your determination to purge the conspirators and to purify our administration and services. I join with you in your great desire to hold together and subordinate our minor difference in order to face the common peril,^{55a}.

Communist Subversion

Countering the Communist threat of subversion was one of Dr. Roy's immediate priorities. A secret conclave of Asian Communist parties held in Calcutta in 1948 decided to start insurgency all over Asia with the backing of the U.S.S.R. and China and to capture political power. India was no exception. Along with the Telengana agitation in Hyderabad, the Communists also had singled out West Bengal reeling under the aftermath of partition for insurgency. Apart from making use of the trade union movement and refugee unrest, they experimented with underground peasant insurgency in Kakdwip area of the Sunderbans, south of Calcutta. Dr. Roy showed great courage in dealing with Communist insurgency during the years 1948-50 by combining firmness with handle this task. But he was unconventional as usual in his choice which fell on his old friend, Kiran Shankar Roy, who had stayed on in Pakistan and was a leader of the Congress opposition in Pakistan Assembly, not even strictly an Indian national. After some persuasion Kiran Shankar agreed and was sworn as the Home Minister. He proved a pillar of strength to his friend and leader until his untimely death after about a year. Within a few months he proposed banning the Communist Party in West Bengal. Dr. Roy readily agreed. Prime Minister Nehru and the Central Cabinet had strong objection to it on the ground that while strong action should be taken by both the Centre and Provinces against the sabotage, terrorism and open revolt of the

55a. Chakraborty, S. Ibid p. 20.

Communists, “banning does not give any powers to deal with an organization which is essentially functioning underground and banning may give the Communists an opportunity to pose as ideological martyrs instead of saboteurs and terrorists.”⁵⁶ But Dr. Roy overruled all these objections and went on to have the CPI declared illegal in West Bengal, a measure of the great authority a State Premier wielded those days. Justifying the Provincial Government’s action, Kiran Shankar Roy said in the Assembly :

The Communist Party wanted to create a state of chaos with the ultimate object of seizing power by violent means, stirring up villagers to defy the forces of law and order, inciting labour to acts of violence against management and to sabotage all production and fully acquiring illicit arms and making West Bengal as the first base of operation.⁵⁷

The Communist Party of India stayed banned in West Bengal till March 1950. It took advantage of the Indian Constitution coming into force on 26 August 1950 to approach the Calcutta High Court in a writ petition under the Fundamental Rights Chapter of the Constitution and got the ban lifted in March, 1950. But the point to emphasize is that even while maintaining a hawkish position to the Communist Party, Bidhan never carried any rancour or personal bitterness against the Communists. He had personal concern for the Underground Communist leaders, his own niece Renu Chakravorty, her husband Nikhil Chakravorty, Jyoti Basu and Somnath Lahiri. Indeed Bidhan was like a majestic banyan tree in the shadow of which even political opponents flourished. He kept himself regularly informed of the Communists’ programme of action, open and secret, through the reports of the I.B. which had planted their agents in the underground party. Unfortunately, Kiran Sankar, already ailing, died in about a year and Bidhan lost one of his most trusted colleagues.

56. Ibid. p. 19.

57. Ibid.

Threat from within

Almost simultaneously he had to address himself to the task of restoring unity and discipline in the West Bengal Congress. From the time Dr. Roy took charge of West Bengal, he was obstructed in his functions apart from Communist-inspired and present unrest by dissidence in the Congress. The very first task he addressed himself therefore was to restore unity and discipline in the West Bengal Congress. Dissidence in the Congress Legislative Party lifted its ugly head within a short time after the new Cabinet had been sworn in. The kingpin was Amar Krishna Ghosh, the Chief Whip of the Congress Party who paradoxically had been a moving force to replace Dr. P.C. Ghosh with Dr. B.C. Roy. Within three months he tried to be a king-maker again. His unreasonable requests had not been entertained by the new Chief Minister. This time his choice was Surendra Mohan Ghosh, President of the West Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. On the 22 April he sent a letter with signatures from some M.L.As including three Ministers calling for installation of a purely Congress Ministry headed by Ghosh in place of the present Ministry which had many outsiders and was therefore not truly a Congress Ministry. At the same time a deputation of A.I.C.C. members from Bengal waited upon Prime Minister Nehru in Bombay and suggested a change in West Bengal. But the conspirators did not reckon with the killer instinct in Bidhan. On the 22 April he issued a statement that a number of signatories had already withdrawn their signature and informed him about it. He also got a number of independent MLAs like the Maharaja of Burdwan, Uday Chand Mahatab and P. D. Himmatsingha to sign the Congress pledge. On the 5th May he called for a special meeting of the Congress Assembly Party at his residence. Of the 53 members present 31 pledged confidence in Dr. Roy's leadership. Three dissident Ministers were absent. Other dissidents, already in minority, withdrew their proposal and suggested mutual discussion. Now Dr. Roy moved for the "kill". Within 24 hours he reconstituted his Cabinet excluding the three dissident Ministers, viz: Bhupati Majumdar, Hem Naskar and Mohini Mohan Burman. This broke the back of the dissidents. All the three former Ministers apologized and

meekly submitted. Within a few months they were reinducted into the Ministry, and they remained loyal to their leader ever afterwards. The total support Dr. Roy later on received from the new West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee President Atulya Ghosh helped him in his task. Having called the doctor for treatment, the Congressmen realized that they had to follow his prescription. The Congress now became a united house except that a section of the Gandhian group, under Dr. P.C. Ghosh's leadership, was soon to leave the Congress to form the Krishak Praja Mazdoor Party.

With the ruling party now behind him, Dr. Roy turned to solving the key problem of what had already come to be known as the problem province of India - law and order. The Communists had also deeply penetrated the student movement. Everyday there was a demonstration in Calcutta on some issue or the other. Many were held in Wellington Square just opposite Dr. Roy's house, or in front of the Writers Buildings, with the demonstrators shouting slogans against the Government and the Congress Party. But Bidhan went on doing his work both in his office, and at home with his usual smiling face and without showing any annoyance. He would often send for the representatives of demonstrators, listen to their specific grievances and try his best to solve those. More often than not, they would go back convinced of the Chief Minister's sincerity in solving their problems. But he also built up a reputation that he was not the person to succumb to any threat, nor condone any act of indiscipline. His training as a medical person equipped him with the ability to marshal all relevant facts and circumstances to have an objective approach and to take timely decisions. In between Dr. Roy had fought unsuccessfully with Nehru to get *Vande Mataram*⁵⁸ rather than *Jana Gana Mana* accepted as Indian national anthem in the draft Indian Constitution. His main ground was the historical association of Bankim Chandra's *Vande Mataram* with the freedom movement although he had equal

58. His letter to Nehru dated the 14th June, 1948 is significant. See Chakraborty S. Ibid p. 26.

respect for Rabindranath Tagore's *Jana Gana Mana*. But Nehru strongly favoured *Jana Gana Mana* on account of its easier adoption, to band music. Bidhan did not agree with Nehru's reasons, but accepted his judgement.

He met his East Bengal counterpart Nurul Amin twice in February in Calcutta to discuss ways and means of stemming the gushing tide of migration of the Hindu and Buddhist minority from East Bengal. He also selected Dr. Kailash Nath Katju as the Governor of West Bengal to succeed C. Rajagopalachari as Governor who was appointed as India's Governor-General on June 10, 1948 to succeed Mountbatten, the last British Governor General of India. Also, he stayed with Nehru for three days in Delhi just before Indian Police action on this sensitive matter. He returned to Calcutta and presumably on Nehru's request called Suhrawardy, who had till then stayed on in India, for a discussion on this issue. His revealing letter to the Prime Minister Nehru of 13 September 1948 is extracted below :⁵⁹

I met Shaheed Suhrawardy this evening and he tells me that in his opinion Muslims in India or in Pakistan will not take any offensive because of Hyderabad operations. Be that as it may, we are taking all caution to prevent any disturbance in this province because even though the Muslims do not start any incident, the Communist Party will on their behalf begin it in the hope that anarchy and confusion will prevail and they will have an opportunity to thrive under such a situation.

On 10 February 1948 the first budget session of the West Bengal Assembly began under the shadow of Gandhiji's martyrdom ten days earlier. On 17 February Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, who like Kiran Shankar Roy was a tower of strength to Dr. Roy in the initial years, presented the first budget of truncated West Bengal, a deficit budget like the last budget of United Bengal presented exactly a year ago by Mohamed Ali of Bogra. But there were bold signals even though West Bengal was one-third of undivided Bengal in terms of size and

59. Ibid p. 14.

population. The annual receipts amounted to Rs. 31 Crores of which Rs. 6 Crores were to be spent on development projects. The province was deficit in jute production and rice crop. All the jute growing areas fell in East Bengal while all the jute mills fell in West Bengal. Further, the new State was already showing signs of alarming refugee problem caused by on-going movement of the minority from across the border. A lot of paddy-growing land had to be diverted to jute cultivation causing further fall in the availability of rice. Attempts also had to be made to introduce jute cultivation in adjoining areas of Bihar and Orissa where rainfall and soil conditions were similar to those of Bengal. Dr. Roy also took up with Premier, Dr. Harekrushan Mahtab of Orissa and Premier Shri Krishna Sinha of Bihar, the issue of rehabilitating part of the refugee population in those provinces and got encouraging response. He persuaded the Central Government to relocate the proposed locomotive factory from Kanchrapara, the earlier proposed site and now considered close to the border, to a site in West Bengal near Mihijam to be renamed Chittaranjan (1948). When Mihijam was selected as a site for India's first locomotive plant many people did not realize that the actual site was going to be in West Bengal although adjacent to Mihijam. The way Dr. Roy offered around 1500 acres of Government land to the Railway authorities and directed the opening of a thana and a post office almost overnight, facilitated the process of the location of this plant in West Bengal. In this he received powerful support from his old friend, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, the Union Industry and Supply Minister. He relentlessly supported the setting up of the Damodar Valley Corporation on the model of Tennessee Valley Authority in the U.S.A. and was personally involved with individual projects like Maithan and Tilaiya dams and Bokaro Thermal Plant. He shared with his close friend, Prime Minister Nehru, the dream of turning the Damodar Valley into Germany's Ruhr Valley.

But these were also the years of putting West Bengal's economy, shattered by partition back on the rail. We have already stated how the loss of jute-growing areas had to be made good by encouraging jute-growing in West Bengal districts and areas in Bihar and Orissa. Lines of communication with Assam, the North-East and the northern districts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri had been disrupted by the creation of East Pakistan. This also had to be made good by restoration of

rail and road links with Assam and North Bengal through a circuitous route. Refugee problem was already manifesting its ugly head, reaching its climax in 1950 when communal rioting in East Bengal triggered off a massive exodus of displaced persons to West Bengal. As early as April, 1948 at Dr. Roy's initiative, an Inter-Dominion Conference was held in Calcutta to discuss the issue of exodus of the Hindus from East Bengal, and of Muslims from West Bengal. The Indian delegation was led by K.C. Neogy and included both Dr. Roy and Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee. Pakistan's delegation was led by Finance Minister, Ghulam Mohammed. An agreement was reached on 9 April 1948. It provided inter alia for establishing provincial, district and local Minorities Boards and for easier movement across the border for people who lived close to the border and had to make daily crossings for petty business. But in spite of all this, the steady movement of refugees from East Bengal continued throughout 1948 and 1949 till it turned into a tidal wave in 1950. Nehru was in favour of the Hindu minority staying on in East Bengal and fighting their battle with the Pakistan Government. Bidhan realized that this was a pipe-dream. On 22 August 1949 he wrote to the Prime Minister:⁶⁰

My dear Jawaharlal,

Your letter of the 16th instant.

You suggest that we should make every effort to prevent the exodus of people from East Bengal. The Hindu leaders have come to West Bengal. Therefore, it is no use thinking of that. Babu Satish Chandra Das Gupta came today, and although he thinks that the situation in East Bengal has worsened in the last two three months and that he does not feel that the East Bengal Government will allow him to work for peace, yet he is prepared to draw up a scheme for opening up centres in East Bengal for those who desire to come away from that province. I have suggested to him that the Ramakrishna Mission, Bharat Sevashraam Sangh and himself might draw up a

60. NMML Archives, New Delhi, Dr. B.C. Roy papers.

scheme for housing such people as might feel frightened to remain in East Bengal. That may be one way of meeting the situation.



With Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi

In spite of what you have said in your letter that the other provinces will not take out refugees, I am in a position to state that Orissa and the native states which have been absorbed into the province should be glad to have our refugees. I have spoken to the Chief Minister, Sri Mahatab, and he seemed agreeable. I am feeling that a planned arrangement of this type might be made in order to meet the situation. As it is, all the hutments and military buildings that were released, are full and more are coming.

Yours sincerely
Bidhan

Nehru wrote in reply :⁶¹

My dear Bidhan,

I have to face a catastrophe, well then we will face it even though many of us may be washed away. Nevertheless one tries one's best to prevent that catastrophe. One has to be clear on this issue, or else our language or our action may mislead people. I have been quite certain, right from the beginning that everything should be done to prevent Hindus in East Bengal from migrating to West Bengal. If that happened on a mass scale it would be a disaster of the first magnitude. Running away is never a solution to a problem. I think the Hindu leaders of East Bengal who have come away have done no service to their people. If, as you suggest, things have gone too far already, then naturally we shall do what we can but I shudder at the prospect and at the magnitude of the human misery that will come in its train. To the last I would try to check migration even if there is war.

Referring to the argument that equal number of Muslims should be pushed out of West Bengal to make room for equal number of migrants from East-Bengal, Jawaharlal Nehru said in the same letter :

The fact that a man is a Muslim, does not make him a non-national. He may have evil designs in his heart. If so, as an individual we can deal with him. But to say of a group of Indian nationals that we shall push them out because some people elsewhere are not behaving as they should is something which has no justification in law or equity. It strikes at the root of the secular State that we claim to be. We just can't do it whatever the consequences. If individuals misbehave that is a different matter. I am glad to learn that Orissa and the Indian states which have been absorbed into that province are prepared to take refugees from East Bengal. Certainly they can actually prepare themselves for it as your Government

61. Chakarborty op. cit p. 32.

can and should. But any indication that you are doing so would encourage the exodus still more and that must be avoided.

West Bengal Government had to open more than 50 refugee relief camps in and around Calcutta and some more in the border districts. Dr. Roy was able to persuade Nehru to appoint a Deputy High Commissioner in Dhaka to represent the grievances of the minority in East Bengal to the Government of East Bengal. Santosh Kumar Basu, an ex-Mayor of Calcutta was appointed. It was at this time that he thought of settling many of the refugees from East Pakistan in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands where climatic and soil conditions were comparable to those in East Bengal and population was small. He also sent a delegation to these islands and received a favourable report. The Centre was open to this idea. But what could have been a beautiful rehabilitation scheme was nipped in the bud by a thoughtless irresponsible political opposition in West Bengal, that opposed sending the refugees across the seas. They mounted a big political agitation and the grandiose scheme of Dr. Roy was frustrated. Eventually there was only a small scheme for persuading a limited number of refugees to go to the Andamans.

An interesting episode of the time was the approval by the West Bengal Assembly of the draft Constitution of India in the autumn session of 1949. However, under Bidhan's leadership, the House passed a unanimous resolution opposing the proposed distribution of central revenues between the Union and the States and urged instead that at least 60 per cent of the net proceeds of the income tax and corporation tax and 50 per cent of the net proceeds of Central Excise on tobacco and export volume of jute goods and sharing of any tax that the Centre may levy under its residual powers should go to the State. This illustrates Dr. Roy's foresight and that what was to become a contentious Centre-State issue during the seventies and eighties was anticipated by him.

The year 1949 started with a lot of student violence fomented by the banned Communist Party. On 18 January there was open violent clash between the police and the students of Calcutta University leading to police firing on the crowd setting fire on trams and public buses.

Four were killed and fifteen injured. This was the foretaste of what was to become the standard pattern of left-inspired violence in Calcutta for at least two or three decades, viz. attempt by student and refugee mobs to march to the prohibited zone around the Raj Bhawan and the Writers Buildings, the police resisting it with lathis, the throwing of brickbats and bombs on the police, the firing of teargas bombs and bullets on the violent crowd by the police, the burning of State transport buses and foreign-owned tram cars by the crowd and the spreading of anti-Police violence all over the city.

Dr. Roy showed his personal charm when, after two days, he won over a hostile student deputation by accepting their demand for withdrawal of prohibitory orders against procession in the city and an enquiry into police excesses and the students in return giving an undertaking to refrain from violence.

Dum Dum Raid by the RCPI

On 26 February, a few days after the death of Dr. Roy's iron man, Kiran Shankar Roy, a splinter group of the Communist Party, the Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI), committed the bizarre incident of raiding the Dum Dum airport, the ordnance factory and the nearby Jessop factory where three foreigners were thrown into the chimney. At the ordnance factory, they looted arms and shot some people, attacked police stations at Gouripore and Basirhat and crossed over to East Pakistan at Itindaghat. Only 25 of the armed raiders could be apprehended by the police. On 4 March, Premier Roy in the course of a long statement described the RCPI raid as a well laid plot smoothly planned for the purpose of creating an unusually striking situation and for collection of arms and ammunition. He also said "the raiders mainly belonged to groups of RCPI with whom CPI in this instance had worked together to bring off a coup"⁶² This event had also its rumblings in the Parliament in February when Nehru made a statement on Communist activities in West Bengal in the course of which he said that during the whole of 1948 the CPI had adopted open hostility to the Government bordering on revolt and that "the arrested men belong to what is known as the Revolutionary

62. Chakraborty S. Ibid p. 37.

Communist Party of India which broke away from the CPI but collaborates with it on occasions".^{62a} An armed peasant movement in the Sunderban area of 24 Parganas (Kakdwip Conspiracy) spearheaded by the CPI was slowly brought under control by a mixed policy of police action and limited land reform measures during the 1950s.

The inauguration of the West Bengal National Volunteer Force, which was meant to be a well-trained paramilitary force in 1949 was a major event. At Dr. Roy's invitation, Gen. Cariappa, the Commander-in-Chief, Indian Armed Forces, visited the training centre and commended the military training that the National Volunteer Force received and offered 200 Bengalees positions in the army. It is a pity that the original concept of the National Volunteer Force being a paramilitary outfit intended to provide a source of recruitment to the Army got diluted later on to the concept of an auxiliary agency to the police.

Rift with Nehru

It was not always roses and roses with Prime Minister Nehru. A memorable by-election to the West Bengal Vidhan Sabha from the South Calcutta constituency was held in June 1949. The Congress candidate Suresh Das, President of the South Calcutta District Congress Committee, was defeated overwhelmingly by Sarat Chandra Bose who had resigned from the Congress to set up the Socialist Republican Party and received support from all the left parties. This defeat shook the West Bengal Congress to its very foundation although Dr. Roy himself congratulated Sarat Chandra Bose, and welcomed his old friend and associate of the 'Big Five' days back to parliamentary life. Nehru who had developed an allergy to Sarat Chandra Bose did not take kindly to this and on 20 June 1949 made a speech that Sarat Chandra Bose's victory amounted to people's no confidence in the West Bengal Ministry which should resign. Dr. Roy took Nehru's stray remarks very seriously and offered to resign on 20 June 1949 but insisted on getting a reply to his request before he was to leave for Switzerland in two days time. Sandwiched

62a. Chakraborty S. Ibid p. 37.

between Communist Party insurgency and opposition of anti ministerialists in the Congress, any sign of coolness from the central leadership was too much for him to put with. However, Nehru retraced his steps and replied in two days time that his comments were misquoted and misunderstood and that he never meant that West Bengal ministry had lost the confidence of its people and should resign. An emergency meeting of the Congress Working Committee held after Dr. Roy had left Calcutta for Europe on 23 June 1949 reiterated its faith in Dr. Roy's leadership.

Visit to Europe, 1949

During his stay in Europe for two months he visited several European countries in search of expertise and know-how for certain development schemes of the province. Though the visit was for the treatment of his eyes by foreign experts he said that he would simultaneously explore the possibilities of the establishment of a salt factory with German collaboration, visit Paris to discuss with experts who had constructed the Paris underground railway his request for sending a team to Calcutta for carrying on investigations into the conditions in that city for such a project. Besides, he met manufacturers of double-decker diesel engine buses in Birmingham for Calcutta State Transport Service, contacted a Swedish firm for building cheap wooden houses for the urban population and refugees. Dr. Roy strongly believed that his visit to the West in quest of knowledge and on-the-spot study of developmental works was urgently needed if West Bengal, or for that matter India, was to progress in a fast changing world.

In Europe the Premier also established contact with a Danish firm for sending a team to survey the Bay of Bengal for deep-sea fishing. Their experts later visited the country and the West Bengal Government acquired some trawlers and the sea-fishing operations began after some time. The experts from the French Metro company came and, after necessary soil testing, submitted about ten volumes of a blueprint on Calcutta's underground railway. The Central Government was to realize the need for such an investigation after quarter of a century and experts from USSR were invited to work for the underground railway of Calcutta. The Metro Railway Project

in Calcutta became a reality only in the 1980s. This enthusiastic approach to solve Calcutta's transport problem seemed rather jarring to many, particularly his political opponents who tried to play down this move as an impracticable proposition. But Bidhan Roy as usual was ahead of his time. In Copenhagen, he studied their cheap urban housing scheme with concrete structure for possible application to the urban areas of West Bengal, and for settling the refugees.

During his absence, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar was the acting Premier, but the West Bengal situation continued to dog the Congress leadership and the Congress President sent a cable to Dr. Roy requesting him to return to India to attend the Congress Working Committee meeting on 13 July, specially to discuss West Bengal's organizational and administrative problems in the wake of the defeat in the South Calcutta by-election. But Dr. Roy expressed his reluctance to return to India at that time interrupting his appointments with the eye specialist in Zurich, Paris and Vienna. He informed Nehru that acting Premier, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar would attend the meeting and represent him. A dissident group among the MLAs in West Bengal had been all the time pressing for the resignation of Dr. Roy and the return of Dr. P.C. Ghosh whereas the Ministerialists opposed any reconsideration until Dr. Roy's return from Europe. On behalf of the dissidents, J.C. Gupta handed over to the Prime Minister in Delhi a memorandum containing seventeen "instances which had brought discredit to the present Ministry". Nehru passed them to the Acting Premier, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, for constituting an enquiry and submitting a report. Dr. Roy returned on 2 September 1949 arriving in Bombay in order to see ailing Sardar Patel. Both Patel and Nehru gave full support to him. Sardar Patel was reported to have said "Dr. Roy is a lion, and those who are after him are mice".⁶³ But Bidhan did feel hemmed in by some ungrateful Congressmen on one side and a non-appreciative Central leadership on the other and had a resignation letter in his pocket when he landed in Bombay. The letter read as follows:

On the 20th January, 1948, Gandhiji, soon after his fast called me and directed that I should take charge

63. Chakraborty S - My years with Dr. B.C. Roy, p. 51.

of the Ministry in Bengal, as I was called upon by the people to do so. I obeyed him as to me he represented the voice of the Congress. Today those who represent this great organization feel that a reshuffled interim Ministry should be formed in Bengal, that an election should be held in Bengal at an early date. My clear duty is to obey such a command. During the 18 months that I was privileged to serve Bengal, I tried to give of my best to my province. I may have erred. I may not have succeeded in satisfying many. I have been unable to supply the justifiable demands of the people in regard to clothing, food and other necessities of life of the people of Bengal. But I claim that I have tried hard and struggled against enormous odds. My conscience and my sense of duty guided me during these weary months and I now go back to where I came from, namely, my medical profession with the consciousness that it is better to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all. I believe I laid the foundation of planned development of my dear province, and to my successor I say Bon Voyage. To the Officers and men of the Government, to my colleagues in the Cabinet and in the Assembly, I wish Godspeed.

I feel, however, that an ad interim ministry at this juncture would not help Bengal, and yet I do not want to stand in the way of the Central authority in their decision to form such a Ministry. Therefore my clear duty is to lay down my office so that some worthier man may be found.⁶⁴

In Bombay, he also met the press and refuted all the allegations. He said sarcastically :

I am thankful to the sponsor of the allegations that he has only limited himself to 17. I thought that the

64. Ibid. p 52.

variegated activities of the West Bengal Cabinet would mean many more allegations because only those who work have criticism levelled against them. Those who are dead, dying or sleeping can have no activities and no criticism about them. I claim that the West Bengal Government has been responsible during the last 19 months of my stewardship for sponsoring various schemes, everyone of which is intended to develop the province as a whole and the country in general.

The crisis ended with Nehru accepting Bidhan's explanations and requesting the West Bengal Premier to give press publicity to them.⁶⁵

From Bombay he returned to Calcutta and resumed his duties as Premier. On the 10 September, 1949 the West Bengal Congress Assembly Party reiterated its confidence in the leadership of Dr. Roy by 34 votes to 14 and requested the Working Committee to reconsider their decision regarding an interim Ministry. Dr. Roy was able to put the idea across to the press that the economic revival and reconstruction of the province had constantly engaged his attention during the previous 19 months. Thus Dr. Roy was able by the end of 1949 to persuade the central leadership not to go for a snap poll in West Bengal as anti-ministerialists had always been asking for but to wait until the general elections were to take place under the new Constitution and the situation became normal.

The West Bengal Government at this time was in serious financial crisis and did not have the funds for relief and rehabilitation of lakhs of displaced people from East Pakistan. The State Premier was always pleading for money from the Central Government- from Prime Minister to every Ministry concerned with relief and rehabilitation - when he found that his State was not getting the same deal as other States having refugees from West Pakistan and the relief structure was practically crumbling down. His exasperation is evident in the following letter dated 1 December 1949 in which he summed up the desperate financial position of the State.

65. Ibid. p. 55.

My dear Jawahar,

Your letter. I am sorry to say it has left me absolutely unconvinced regarding the conclusion contained therein and the arguments these conclusions are based on.

You are under the impression that your Government gave us a 'large grant' for the purpose of 'relief' and rehabilitation. Do you realise that the total grant received for this purpose from your Government in two years, 1948-49 and 1949-50, is a little over 3 crore, the rest about 5 crore was given in the form of a loan? Do you realise that this sum is "insignificant" compared to what has been spent for refugees from West Pakistan? I do not want to draw comparisons, because they are always liable to become invidious. But I do say that the 'grant' so far given is insignificant for 16 lakh displaced people because it works out at about Rs. 20 per capita spread over two years. Will you call it magnificent?

My next point is that I did not ask for any diversion of the grant for relief and rehabilitation. All I said was that our expenditure and firm commitment for the year 1949-50 is estimated to be Rs. 4,75,00,000. A part of the sum (about 1-3/4 crore) is to be paid as grant and 3 crore in the form of loan. I agreed to space out the Rs. 3 Crore loan and make payments over extended periods . . . this year, 1949-50. I requested you all to divert a loan - not grant - if one crore to be made in two years for the dispersal of students from Calcutta, as I felt that by this method I would save much trouble in future. The congestion of students is a menace to Calcutta. Any major incident caused by the overcrowding may mean loss of life due to want of food, etc. and increased expenditure on police and military arrangements. On the whole, most of the students we asked the loan for are refugee

students and the whole process is a rehabilitation of a province.

Allow me to repeat what I have said more than once that when Bengal was partitioned, West Bengal started with a deficit balance of 1-1/2 crores still unpaid. We were badly treated by a Centre which took away part of our share of Income-tax and jute tax allotment and distributed the Income-tax money to other provinces and appropriated the jute tax-share for themselves. The fact remains however that without previous intimation to us we were informed in March 1948 that our share of the income-tax receipts has been reduced from 20% to 12% or in other words, our share which was Rs. 6 crores annual was reduced to 3-1/2 crore. The remaining 2-1/2 crores were distributed to other provinces. See how iniquitous this new arrangement proves to be. Bombay with a population of 21 millions received an enhanced share from 20 to 21% whereas West Bengal with the same population or perhaps a little more got her share reduced from 20 percent to 12 percent. And yet West Bengal and Bombay contributed almost the same amounts towards the Income-tax pool. The reason given is ostensibly the reduction in size of Bengal, but the fact is that the portion of Bengal formed in East Bengal contributed only 5 percent to the total Income-tax collection of undivided Bengal. Calcutta and the industrial area have contributed mostly in the past, they remained with us and, therefore, the income-tax figures has also practically remained the same even after the partition. So I do not know that logic or principle of equity brought about the new allocation. The result has been that our finances were badly crippled. I do not want to press this parochial approach but we are forced by circumstances to do so.

While we are struggling with depleted finances, we

had to provide new border police pickets - a huge extra burden on our province. We had to provide border roads for which we were not prepared and which were not necessary for civil administration. We had to protect the borders and the points where smuggled and contraband goods pass across. These two are definitely in the interests of India as a whole and yet in spite of repeated requests we have no financial support from the Centre on these matters.

Then came the exodus of 1-1/2 million of people who belong to upper and middle class Hindu families, who came here hungry and starved, having lost all including their hope of finding subsistence in the new place. For months, the Government of India would not accept the liabilities on their account. The Provincial Government had to carry on as best as they could. And for these refugees, a magnificent sum of Rs. 20 per capita has been granted by the Centre in two years.

I fully realise the tremendous difficulties which the Centre has to face having been myself responsible for industrial and other constructive schemes. I know - I am convinced - that these difficulties are due to the vacillating policies of the Centre. They have no definite vision and method of executing a scheme, the individual components of the Centre do not act in a team. You are wrong when you say that the difficulties of the Centre are greater than those of the provinces but we may agree to differ on this point. I need not be intensely critical as criticism of others without accepting responsibilities for their task has no reality.

I again press for the scheme of dispersal of students which I have put forward in the interest of the province. If you do not care to give us this loan, you allow us to float a loan and we will be happy. I give a timely and gentle warning so that you may not blame us for trouble which we may very well avoid by timely action.⁶⁶

66. NMML, Dr. B.C. Roy Papers, Roy's- this was in response to Nehru's letter to him dated 20 September 1949.

Cooch Behar's Accession, 1950

The year 1950 was marked by the accession of the princely state of Cooch Behar, consisting of 1980 square miles in area with a population of 8 lakh, to West Bengal and by the recurrence of communal violence on an unprecedented scale in both East and West Bengal resulting in an equally unprecedented flow of refugees to West Bengal. On 1 January 1950, Dr. B.C. Roy accompanied by his Chief Secretary and Divisional Commissioner, flew to Cooch Behar to revive the instrument of accession from Sardar Patel's representative, Nanjappa, and presided over the public function to mark this accession for which he had worked hard in persuading Patel and Nehru. He announced that Cooch Behar would be maintained as a separate district with Headquarters at Cooch Behar town. For historical as well as for sentimental reasons that representation would be given to the people in the provincial assembly on the basis of population and that all the State Government servants would be absorbed in West Bengal State Service. The accession of Cooch Behar was a great sop to the distressed people of West Bengal who welcomed it whole-heartedly.

Indian Constitution, 1950; Bidhan Becomes Chief Minister

On 8 January came Prime Minister Nehru's announcement that general elections would be held as soon as possible on the basis of adult franchise under the new Constitution which would come into being on 26 January 1950. This was a triumph for Dr. Roy and his Ministry. On the same day, on his way back from the Jadavpur T.B. Hospital, he was roughed up by an unruly mob, by far the first and the last such attempt that he had to face in his public life. This was presumably the result of the subversive activities of the underground Communist movement. Sardar Patel himself came to Calcutta on 12 January to study the law and order situation in the state and addressed a crowd of half a million at the Calcutta Maidan asking people to face the challenge of violence bravely. On 26 January, the new Indian Constitution came into being and the day was celebrated as India's first Republic Day amid scenes of unprecedented public rejoicing and illumination. The Governor, the Council of Ministers and Speaker of the Assembly took oath under the new Constitution. Under the new dispensation, Dr. Roy became Chief Minister, no

longer the Prime Minister or Premier as under the 1935 Act. Another fall out was the revoking of the ban on the CPI by Calcutta High Court.

Refugee exodus from East Bengal

Hardly had the celebration died down there started the biggest of the exodus of the Hindu minority from East Bengal in the first week of February 1950. Widespread violence especially on the Namasudra community, occurred in the district of Khulan, Jessore and Faridpur which was followed by unprecedented migration from those districts to West Bengal. One evening he received news that some bogies from East Bengal had reached without any passengers. So serious was the situation in Pakistan that Jogendra Nath Mandal, Pakistan's Law and Labour Minister, had to seek asylum in India and announce before the Press in Calcutta that it was no longer safe for the Hindu minority to live in Pakistan.

Dr. Roy worked untiringly to bring the stranded refugees to India without waiting for any directive from the Centre. He immediately telephoned Nehru and said that only war could end this human suffering and India should militarily intervene in Pakistan Government. He sent as many as 16 chartered planes on his own responsibility to Dhaka, taking advantage of his position as Founder chairman of Airways India Ltd. The Managing Director of the Airways, Shri K.K. Roy, Dr. Roy's old friend, was of great assistance. There was violence in Howrah where the Muslims became victims of rioting. Curfew had to be imposed both in Calcutta and Howrah and certain parts of West Bengal and the military had to be called in.

One evening A.K. Fazlul Huq, former Prime Minister of undivided Bengal, arrived at Dr. Roy's residence and complained of violence against Muslim minorities around his own house at Jhowtolla. Both the old-time friends were full of anguish at the suffering of innocent people in both Bengals. Dr. Roy sent Mr. Huq to his own residence in his own car and before taking leave requested him to go immediately to Barisal where communal violence was raging in full fury following the calculated spreading of false news that Fazlul Huq had been killed in Calcutta. He should scotch all such rumors by showing the people of Barisal that he was safe and sound. Fazlul Huq immediately responded to his

old friend's appeal and proceeded to Barisal in a few days to restore communal peace as best as he could do.⁶⁷

With the tidal wave of migration from East Pakistan showing no sign of abatement and the Pakistan Government reneging on all commitments, Dr. Roy was compelled to think in terms of Jinnah's idea of an exchange of population between the two countries as a last resort to stop mass murder and suffering. But Nehru was totally adamant on this issue. He also brushed aside the other idea of making Pakistan cede a part of East Bengal territory so as to settle the displaced minority living in refugee camps in India on this ceded territory. "It is quite certain that not an inch of territory is going to be given to us by Pakistan except possibly by war".⁶⁸ Even this last extreme possibility was seriously considered when the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Armed Forces, Gen. Cariappa accompanied by G.O.C. Bengal Area, Maj. Gen. S.B. S. Roy conferred with Dr. Roy at his residence on three consecutive days with a map of undivided Bengal showing trouble spots like Khulna, Jessore, Barisal and Dhaka. Several alternatives including air-dropping of paratroopers at these localities were considered.⁶⁹ But nothing concrete came out because Prime Minister Nehru was unwilling to risk a war between the two dominions, its international repercussions and the possible fall-out of communal clashes in the whole subcontinent. In a 4000 word statement before Parliament on 23 February 1950,⁷⁰ Nehru related the tragic happenings in Khulna, Barisal and Rajshahi districts and in Dhaka and their tragic fall-out, and ruled out both exchange of population and war as unrealistic, but assured the House that henceforward Bengal would receive his priority of attention. He preferred to trust Liaquat Ali's assurance. Liaquat Ali travelled in East Pakistan for four days and addressed meetings of minority groups. Nehru visited Calcutta thrice. Liaquat Ali came to Delhi on 7 April 1950 and after protracted negotiations signed an agreement with Nehru on 18 April 1950 (Nehru-Liaquat Ali Pact) on the communal situation in the two Bengals, Assam and Tripura. This pact did formally recognise the basic human rights of the minority population in both India and East

67. Chakraborty S-My Years with B.C. Roy-page 71.

68. Ibid Nehru's letter to B.C. Roy page 73.

69. Ibid pp 74-75.

70. Lok Sabha Proceedings, 1950.

Pakistan, and discouraged migration between West Bengal, Assam and Tripura on the one hand and East Pakistan on the other. It also provided for easy movement between the two Bengals. On Roy's recommendation, Justice Charu Chandra Biswas was appointed India's first Minister of Minority Affairs. Dr. A.M. Malek was appointed by Pakistan Government as Pakistan's first Minister of Minority Affairs. But the safeguards provided by the Pact by and large remained on paper and were followed more in breach than observance, justifying the apprehension of Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee who opposed the pact as a sell-out and resigned from the Indian Cabinet along with K.C. Neogy.

Shyama Prasad and Neogy were given an overwhelming public reception at Howrah station on their return to Calcutta after resignation, reflecting that the public opinion was on their side. Dr. Roy had to fight a rearguard action. He was in favour of giving the Pact a chance and not straightway declaring war on it, as his friend Shyama Prasad did. On 16 April 1950 he issued a formal statement denying a rumour that some of West Bengal Ministers had also resigned in protest against the Nehru-Liaquat pact, and announcing without any ambiguity that "I and my colleagues will give the Nehru-Liaquat Agreement the fullest trial in the spirit in which it has been adopted." He appointed Dr. R. Ahmed, a professional colleague, as a Minister representing the minority community. He went to Dhaka along with the Assam Chief Minister on 15 May to straighten out some of the problems of resettling evacuees in their former homes. There were some initial successes. A Press Note issued by the Government of West Bengal stated that from mid-April to the end of August, 1950 the number of Hindus migrating to West Bengal was 4,60,610 while the corresponding number of Muslims migrants from West Bengal to East Bengal was 1,39,990.

Dr. Roy rose to magnificent heights in restoring communal peace in West Bengal and stemming the exodus from East Bengal. He directly dealt with newspaper editors and with the leaders of the Left opposition who luckily cooperated with him on this occasion. He was in daily telephonic contact with Nehru and Patel, the former a moderate and the latter a hard-liner on the issue. While Nehru was bitterly critical of the Calcutta press and called it communal, Patel

was more in tune with Shyama Prasad and on one occasion threatened Pakistan that India would be forced to ask Pakistan to surrender land to accommodate Hindu refugees forced out of their homeland. In the same spirit, Shyama Prasad thundered on the floor of the Parliament on 30 July 1950 that there would be an inevitable revolution in the country unless the Government solved the refugee problem, and that there were only three ways by which the problem could be solved :

- (i) unification of the two countries;
- (ii) planned exchange of population or
- (iii) sufficient territories yielded by Pakistan to accommodate the displaced minorities of East Bengal.

Nehru opposed all the three options on grounds of international repercussions and violating the principles of the Indian Constitution.⁷¹ History was to prove that Nehru was wrong in his assessment, and Patel, Shyama Prasad and Dr. Roy were right in their own different ways in not trusting the words and good faith of the Pakistan rulers. The refugee camps in West Bengal continued to be full to the brim, and more and more Hindus came to West Bengal and Assam with each passing day till the Hindu population in East Bengal, only a few percentage points less than the Muslims at the time of Partition, was to come down to around 10 percent by the decade of the 70s. Once again, Dr. Roy showed his best administrative acumen in rehabilitating the refugees living in camps in fallow lands or reclaimed lands, in some trades and professions, in newer areas like Andaman and areas in Bihar and Orissa and in newer professions like sailors in inland water transport where there was a perceived vacuum on account of the departure of the sailors and marine workers, who had become Pakistan nationals.

Problem of Settling Refugees from East Bengal

The insurmountable and complex problem of rehabilitation of refugees who started pouring into West Bengal in endless stream after partition was a task which needed energetic administrative action to face it with a firm, tactful and sympathetic spirit to handle it. Dr. Roy decided to create a separate department and take over its administration.

71. Lok Sabha proceedings.

Thus the newly created department came to be known as “Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department”, with Shri Hiranmoy Banerjee, ICS, a trusted officer of Dr. Roy as the Commissioner and Ex-officio Secretary.

Things went beyond control after March, 1950, when due to recurrence of communal disturbances in East Pakistan the influx increased by leaps and bounds and almost reached a breaking point. Necessary relief had to be made available to those who had to come away from their motherland overnight under duress. There were harrowing tales of woes and the bitterest experiences related by them in the deplorable conditions under which they had to leave their hearths and homes. In the middle of 1950 there was a mass movement among refugees to squat upon unoccupied land around Calcutta. There were about 200 unoccupied estates of rich people to the north of Calcutta along the Jessore Road and Barrackpur Trunk Road. They were colloquially known as ‘Baganbari’ meant for the weekend stay and recreation of the rich owners. Each one of them had substantial land attached to it. The refugees occupied those ‘baganbari’ lands for settling down and creating their own homesteads. Whether or not there was any connivance of the Government in this mass movement is open to question. But the police was instructed to look away.⁷² It did not register cases of encroachment, nor took any physical action to prevent it. This was indeed carried out during a few weeks and a sizeable percentage of the refugee population hanging around Greater Calcutta could be settled on small plots parcelled out among themselves. This was a better proposition than keeping them for long in refugee camps like the Coopers camp. This is one of the spectacular cases of land sharing by those who needed homestead land. Thus an array of refugee colonies with titles such as Bapuji colony, Netaji Colony, Nehru Colony and Bhagvati Colony came up almost overnight around Calcutta. Dr. Roy persuaded Sri Ajit Prasad Jain, the Union Minister of Refugee Rehabilitation to recognize them and ensure that bonafide squatters were not evicted. Today, these settlements are all prosperous colonies. This was indeed a perfect example of socialistic planning, of “each according to his ability, to each according to his need”. Dr. Roy was

72. As told by senior civil servants who were working with Dr. Roy those days and who wish to be unnamed.

so concerned with the uprooted refugees that he even thought of providing them in their colonies some entertainment in their spare time. He talked to playwrights like Manmatha Roy and musicians like Pankaj Mallik, Hemanta Mukherjee and Utpala Sen to organise entertainment programmes, in the colonies for recreation of the refugees during the evening hours. Initially, these attempts met with a lot of hostile opposition from irate refugees. But thereafter they accepted this gratefully. In a way this was the beginning of what subsequently became the folk entertainment section of the West Bengal Government.

Food Scarcity

These were years of chronic food grains scarcity. The country had an overall food grain deficit. For West Bengal the problem was more acute on account of the separation of the main paddy growing tracts from West Bengal due to partition, the diversion of two lakh acres of paddy land to jute growing and the burgeoning refugee problem. In July 1950 West Bengal was facing a gap of about two lakh tonnes of food grains between demand and supply and the stock of foodgrains in government godowns was low. Dr. Roy had to take steps to prevent breakdown of the rationing system which would lead to chaos. He himself stopped eating rice, and had to journey to Delhi every week to get extra supplies from the Central reserves. The Central Food Minister, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, his good friend was ever obliging. The worst was avoided and West Bengal could stave off a crisis.

Assent of Atulya Ghosh in Congress Politics

There was also a sharpening of the power struggle within the West Bengal Congress between the ministerialist group headed by Atulya Ghosh-led Midnapor-Hoogly group on the one hand and dissidents spearheaded by Dr. P.C. Ghosh's Khadi group and Surendra Mohan Ghosh's Yugantar group, on the other. The election of delegates for the Nasik Congress in September 1950 provided the spark. Eventually the unanimous election of Atulya Ghosh as President, West Bengal Provincial Congress and Bijoy Singh Nahar as General Secretary with Dr. Roy's backing on September 17, 1950 settled the issue. From now on till Dr. Roy's death he always enjoyed the organisation's unstinted support. During this period, Atulya Ghosh's

leadership was only twice under challenge, once following Ashoke Sen's defeat in the by-election to the Lok Sabha on the West Bengal-Bihar merger issue (1956), and the other occasion when Siddhartha Shankar Ray left the Congress and successfully contested the Congress with Leftist support from the South Calcutta Assembly constituency in a by-election. But Dr. Roy gave his powerful backing on each occasion to Atulya Ghosh. Gradually the dissident groups broke away from the Congress. The Khadi group led by Dr. P.C. Ghosh and Dr. Suresh Banerjee formed the Krishak Praja Mazdoor Party. Shortly before this, Hemanta Kumar Bose, secretary of the Congress Legislative Party resigned to revive the All India Forward Block. But the Congress in West Bengal, under Bidhan's leadership, weathered out these challenges. When the Budget session of the West Bengal Assembly opened on 8 February 1951 several Congress stalwarts, like P.C. Ghosh and Suresh Banerjee sat on the opposition benches along with the two Communists - Jyoti Basu and Ratanlal Brahman and 9 Muslim Leaguers. The combined opposition members now numbered 19.

The Governor's address indicated that of the 23 lakh refugees, 12 lakhs were fully rehabilitated. But the balance 11 lakh mostly in camps or scattered around Calcutta in squatters colonies created serious problems for years. It created legal and law and order problems, and also provided manpower to the Left parties in their political movements. The Communist Party and the Gandhians, under the leadership of Dr. P.C. Ghosh and Dr. Suresh Banerjee, though ideologically apart, joined hands in exploiting the refugees in anti-government demonstrations. On 28 March 1951, the KPMP, Forward Black and the Leftists led a huge procession of refugees to the Assembly House protesting against Government's Unauthorised Persons Eviction Bill. The leaders were arrested and the crowd dispersed by the police for violating the prohibitory order under section 144. Within the Assembly Dr. Roy rose to the occasion in making up for the loss of Kiran Sankar Roy and the continued absence of Nalini Ranjan Sarkar on account of illness. His oratorical skill was at his best. The Budget estimates of 1951-52 presented by ailing Nalini Ranjay Sarkar from a wheel chair showed that the moth-eaten State of West Bengal had nearly overcome the ill-effects of Partition and had almost reached the income and expenditure levels of undivided

Bengal. As against the revenue receipts of over Rs. 34 crores, the expenditure was estimated at Rs. 38.8 crore, thus leaving a gap of Rs. 4 crore. In a letter to Nehru dated 17th April, 1951, Dr. Roy, now Chief Minister and no longer Premier wrote:⁷³

Your letter has set me thinking furiously over the situation not only in the Province but in the rest of India. Naturally one's reaction is greatly by one's environments. In this province, as you know, we have not only the question of East Bengal and West Bengal, the question of refugees coming in a state of mental excitement which enables the caréerist politician to get hold of them and utilise them for various types of propaganda against the Government and the Congress, not only have we the problem of the Communists and the Forward Block, both of whom are very active at the present moment, but we have in this province the problem of a large number of seasoned Congress workers who have definitely left the Congress and who are now out to down the Congress and the Congress Government at every available opportunity. Apart from this, there are areas where the scheduled castes are in overwhelming numbers, and many of them suffer from an inferiority complex and complain that the Congress have not looked after them as much as they desired. But apart from all the above factors the most important factor is the element of goondaism which is present in the province. This goonda element does not necessarily belong to any political party or group, but they merely take advantage of disturbed situation and create various problems.

Yours faithfully
Bidhan

Side by side with West Bengal matters he was also advising Nehru about the need to allow Baidyanath Mukherjee, Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka, to resign from his job and to return to Assam

73. NMML, New Delhi - Dr. B.C. Roy papers.

politics to recognise the Congress in the Barak Valley and to strengthen Chief Minister Bishnuram Medh's hands.⁷⁴

Dr. Roy was deeply influenced by the Tennessee Valley Project in the USA and felt that such multi- purpose river valley project held great potential for India in giving the people the benefits of irrigation, flood control, hydel power and, to some extent, inland navigation. He and Nehru shared this common vision and both encouraged the formation of the Damodar Valley Corporation with the Centre, Bihar and West Bengal sharing one third each. West Bengal Government undertook to construct a simialar, albeit smaller project, viz., the Mayurakshi River Valley project with collaboration from the Canadian Government. The project was executed two years ahead of schedule, a land mark achievement amidst political controversies and chronic troubles of a border State. On 30 July 1951 when Dr. Roy commissioned the Tilpara Barrage in Birbhum district as a part of the Mayurakshi Valley Project, and the water of the reservoir gushed out along the 150 miles of irrigation canals, this was hailed as a great achievement. This was to be followed by the Massanjore dam and an hydro- electric plant.

Meanwhile momentous changes were taking place in the Central Congress politics in Delhi. The passing away of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on 15 December 1950, had created a void. Dr. Roy described this as "a personal loss as he and I had been in very close contact since I took up the work of Administration in this State. I always loved to depend on his practical advice and guidance in administration".⁷⁵ Nehru is believed to have suggested Bidhan's moving to Delhi⁷⁶ to fill the void created by Patel's death. But not for Bidhan was the so- called glitter of Delhi. Also he was too committed to the task of saving his beloved Bengal. After Patel's death the Congress got sharply polarized between Prime Minister Nehru's supporters and the followers of Congress President Purshottam Das Tandon. Even the Provincial Congress Committees were vertically divided. Dr. Roy felt that Nehru's hands needed to be strengthened if Congress had to win the General election

74. Chakraborty S-My days with Dr. B.C. Roy, page 93.

75. Ibid pages 60-62.

76. Ibid - This is confirmed verbally by Shri S.M. Bose, who was working closely with Dr. Roy as Deputy Secretary.

due in about six months. His first task was to persuade the West Bengal Pradesh Congress, which had supported Tandon against J.B. Kripalani in the presidential election to switch to Nehru's side. He also initiated a move that Tandon should voluntarily resign in order to avoid an ugly confrontation that would damage the party. He was successful in his mediatory role when Tandon agreed to resign and Nehru took over as Congress President. This set the pattern in Congress politics for several decades.

But he was not successful in the other mediatory role he had taken over in trying to persuade his friend Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, Union Communications Minister, from leaving the Congress and joining the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party floated by J.B. Kripalani. Kidwai had asserted his right to participate in political activities in protest against certain Congress policies. Nehru did not agree to this concept of intra-party democracy. Eventually he resigned in spite of the mediatory efforts of Dr. Roy described by the Delhi press as "interventionist".⁷⁷ Dr. P.C. Ghosh's Krishak Praja Mazdoor Party in West Bengal also merged itself with Kripalani's KMPP on the eve of the first General Elections under the new Constitution.

Dr. Roy's interest in University Education

Dr. Roy's deep and long-standing interest in the affairs of Calcutta University was well-known. On behalf of the University, he took up the cause for grants from the Central Government and University Grants Commission. But over the years Calcutta University for various reasons had reached a saturation point to cope with the ever increasing demand for higher education. This was agitating Dr. Roy's mind and he took up the task of establishing a few Universities. Thus within a short span of few years Jadavpur, Burdwan, North Bengal and Kalyani Universities came up one after another to reduce the pressure on Calcutta University.

The National Council of Education, Jadavpur, which had played an important role in the history of freedom movement had Dr. Roy himself as President. Technical education was already in existence under the council. Dr. Roy expanded the facilities in making Jadavpur

77. Ibid.

a full-fledged University. Burdwan University was established mainly to cater to the needs of the students in the district on the west of river Hughli.

Later on, Dr. Roy considered the setting up of University in North Bengal to fulfil the long-felt want of the people of the hills and plains in that part of the State. He felt it would give a tremendous psychological boost to the people of the region, more particularly the hill people who would take pride in having a University of their own. With this end in view, a large area in Siliguri in picturesque surroundings was selected by Dr. Roy after he visited the area and in consultation with some experts.

Haringhata dairy and poultry farm conceived of initially by Governor Richard Casay before Independence and located close to the recently developed Kalyani township was ideally situated for an Agricultural University. Of the twin Universities established there one catered to the requirements of post-graduate studies in agricultural science and the other for normal subjects. Calcutta University was thus relieved of much burden.

IIT Kharagpur

Late in 1949, Dr. Roy was informed by Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, then Union Minister for Commerce and Industry, that the Union Government was contemplating to establish a Technological University. Dr. Roy contacted Dr. S.S. Bhatnagar, Scientific Adviser to the Prime Minister. Dr. Bhatnagar wanted a place which had the infrastructure and multiple Railway communication system. Dr. Roy jumped into the proposal and offered him Hugli township near Kharagpur. Dr. Roy knew that Dr. J.C. Ghosh, Director of the Institute of Sciences, Bangalore was a personal friend of Dr. Bhatnagar who could influence him on this issue. Dr. Roy got in touch with Dr. Ghosh and invited both Dr. Bhatnagar and Dr. Ghosh to Kharagpur. From there they visited Hijli in Midnapore district where the British Government had a detention camp for security prisoners (Indian freedom fighters). The camp had administrative buildings, training centre for security staff with corresponding facilities. Dr. Bhatnagar liked the place and agreed that it would be a suitable site for a

Technical University. On their recommendation Government of India agreed that the Indian Institute of Technology would be set up in Hijli with German collaboration. Dr. Roy was aware of Dr. Ghosh's ability as an organizer and his scientific mind. He persuaded Dr. Ghosh to be the first Director of IIT, Kharagpur, IIT Kharagpur was the first of the IITs in India and was a significant landmark in our country's technical education scenario.

The General Elections 1952

Preparations for the ensuing General Elections, the very first under the new Constitution were now in full swing. Dr. Roy as Chairman of the Pradesh Congress Election Committee, introduced the practice of interviewing each of the intending Congress candidates from the 238 constituencies of the State Assembly in order to assess their capabilities. This occupied 8 to 10 hours every day. But he went about this task as thoroughly as he could, as a physician, examining his patients. Dr. Roy was permitted by the Board as a very special case to contest from two constituencies viz. Bowbazar (his home constituency) and Mahishadol in Midnapore. This was the first General election on the basis of universal adult franchise and hence the election campaign had to be patterned on a new basis seeking to catch the eyes of unlettered masses. New innovative visual features such as neon signs on important street crossings, bill-boards and pictorial pamphlets were introduced under Dr. B.C. Roy's imaginative leadership. Apart from West Bengal, Dr. Roy was also placed in charge of Bihar for supervising and coordinating Congress campaign. He simultaneously inaugurated the Congress campaign in Bihar with addresses on the same day - 14 January - at Dhanbad and Purulia. He also had to be a fund raiser for the Congress High Command and did so by appealing to his industrialist friends.

Arrayed against the Congress in West Bengal were four major opposition groups viz. the Communist Party of India, now restored to legal existence in West Bengal under a Calcutta High Court order; the Jan Sangh led by Shyama Prasad, United Socialist Block including KMPP, RCPI, Forward Block (Marxist) and the Bolshevik Party and the Socialist Party led by Jai Prakash Narayan and their allies like Forward Block and RCPI (Saumyen Tagore Group). But all of

them were united only in blind anti-Congressism and failed to project either a common programme or a common campaign. There were deep ideological and personal differences. Dr. Roy, the shrewd political observer that he was, perceived and exploited this and predicted a convincing Congress victory.

Polling in the first General Elections brilliantly organized by India's first Chief Election Commissioner, Sukumar Sen, was a long-winded process. It began on 3 January 1952 and continued at a leisurely pace on different dates till 5 February. Dr. Roy who had not paid any attention to his own Bowbazar constituency devoted the last three days before 22 January when Calcutta went to polls doing padyatra in that area visiting bustees and bye-lanes and directly appealing to the voters. Thus he turned the scales in his favour in what had looked like a difficult contest, a straight fight against Satyapriya Banerjee, the United Left candidate. He won by a majority of 4111 votes in a constituency, which by general reckoning would have gone to the Leftists. But while the people had demonstrated their confidence in Bidhan, they unseated as many as seven Cabinet Ministers out of eleven including some stalwarts like P.C. Sen, Kalipada Mukherjee and Bimal Chandra Sinha. This created considerable problem for Dr. Roy to form his Cabinet. In fact, the process was delayed by over two months. He was keen on including at least two of the defeated stalwarts viz. Food Minister, P.C. Sen and the Labour Minister, K.P. Mukherjee. But the Congress President had ruled that no defeated Minister was to be reinducted in the Cabinet, either through the Upper House route or through a by-election. Dr. Roy was never known to abandon loyal colleagues. He was therefore keen that both should be in the Cabinet. To his pleading that "they both possess extraordinary knowledge of their own departments and I do not know of any person in the Assembly who can fill up these post",⁷⁸ Nehru's attitude was inflexible. "Whatever the merits of the individuals might be, I am quite sure that trying to take them into the Upper House and subsequently into the Ministry would create a very bad impression on the public, and would weaken our position. It is better not to have a competent person than to weaken the entire position."⁷⁹ Even the Calcutta press on getting a wind of

78. Chakraborty S. op cit p. 104.

79. Ibid page 104.

the Chief Minister's game plan opposed this move. But Dr. Roy, true to himself, showed a bulldog tenacity in a crisis, got both of them returned to the Upper House from the local bodies constituencies and formed his new Cabinet with 13 Cabinet Ministers including these two on 11 June 1952. Nehru had to acquiesce in it. He also created history by including Mrs. Renuka Ray, wife of the then Chief Secretary. S.N. Roy, ICS, in his Cabinet as Minister for Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation. Incidentally, this lady had lost in the elections for the Lok Sabha. There was an uproar in the Lok Sabha. The move was opposed by Prime Minister Nehru and lampooned by the Communists. But Dr. Roy stood his ground. The year 1952 ended the first phase of Dr. Roy's rule as Chief Minister. He had overcome all opposition from within and outside, had brought about all-round political stability and put West Bengal's shattered economy back on the rails on a steady journey to recovery and reconstruction.

By 1952-53 the economy of West Bengal had been largely rehabilitated and the position stabilized after the trauma of the partition. This was reflected in the election results. The Congress under Dr. Roy's leadership secured 143 seats out of 238 in Bengal Assembly. The CPI, just out of its ban, became the main opposition and Dr. Shyama Prasad's newly established Bharatiya Jan Sangh had 14 seats. Within the Congress Dr. Roy's supremacy was unchallenged. At the national level also, his position had been established as an elder statesman whose advice was sought by the Central Congress leadership on all major matters. He was always available for advice and guidance when they were needed either by the Government of India or by the Congress Party.

From 1952 onwards he could turn his attention to economic developemnt seriously. His mind was for ever at work seeking gaps in Bengal's economy and filling them with appropriate schemes. Whether it was making ropes with seesam tree barks in Jalpaiguri; a steel plant at Durgapur or the Durgapur Projects, setting up the Haringhata Dairy, or an Agricultural University at Kalyani, the new township he had planned; developing tourist centres in Darjeeling and Digha or tribal welfare projects in Jhargrama or Purulia; establishing India's first Business School, the Institute of Social Welfare and Business

Management or the first IIT at Kharagpur; conceiving the higher secondary multi-purpose school system or setting up several new Medical Colleges; coming to the help of young film maker, Satyajit Ray, and breaking new ground by financing him to produce the epoch-making film *Pather Panchali* or inviting the legendary Uday Shankar to reestablish his dance Academy in Calcutta after his existing one at Almora had been destroyed by fire, his creative mind was forever at work seeking new opportunities to create enterprises in newer and newer fields.

Just as in Nehru's case, after the death of Sardar Patel and Maulana Azad, there were no peers, similarly Bidhan was deprived of his peers in politics after the passing away of Kiran Shankar Roy and Nalini Sarkar. At professional levels, he had a few close friends. But in politics he was a lonely man. He came to rely over the years a great deal on Atulya Ghosh who was by and large left to deal with the party. West Bengal had a galaxy of ICS officers in the early days. A few of them, notably the first Chief Secretary, Sukumar Sen, who became India's first Chief Election Commissioner, long-term Chief Secretaries S.N. Ray and R. Gupta, Judicial Secretary, K.K. Hajra were close to him and he relied on them a great deal. There were also others like R.S. Trivedi, K. Sen, Ashok Mitra and H.N. Ray. As Finance Secretary he chose a Deputy Magistrate, Benoy Dasgupta who was promoted to the I.A.S. and became one of his most trusted aides. As Education Secretary he chose Dr. D. M. Sen, and as Health Secretary, Lt. General D.N. Chakravorty. He would often ignore seniority or service requirements to choose competent people who would deliver the goods. But he always stood by them when wronged by politicians.

Economic Prosperity and Political Stability

After his decisive success in the first General Elections held under the new Republican Constitution on the basis of adult franchise, chronic dissidence in the Congress disappeared. The Congress Party in West Bengal now solidly under Atulya Ghosh, gave him full support. Dr. Roy also reciprocated by letting Atulya Ghosh run the party with full authority. The goodwill that he had enjoyed all along with Nehru despite once a while rumblings grew stronger and stronger with every passing year. He could now devote his complete undivided attention to West Bengal's development. Development schemes came up in a steady procession one after another in every field: industry, agriculture, health, education, social development and urban renewal etc.

Dr. Roy, like Nehru, took a lot of interest in the community development project which, under Nehru's inspiration and S.K. Dey's motivated leadership, sought to bring all development activities in rural India like agriculture, industry, veterinary services and social development under the common umbrella of a Community Development Block with a Block Development Officer in overall command. He revolutionized health services by creating the Primary Health Centres in every thana and bringing modern medical and health care to the rural community for the first time. The medical and public health services in the districts were integrated and revamped under a Chief Medical Officer of Health (the former Civil Surgeon rechristened as such). There was complete eradication of malaria and small pox, scourges, which had devastated the land in the past. Cholera, another menace also nearly disappeared. In education, he created the multipurpose Higher Secondary Schools with all modern subjects and facilities. The three-year degree course was introduced and new Universities came up. Whether in education or health, it was common knowledge that it was Dr. Roy who was the guardian angel, although there was a

Health Minister and an Education Minister. This period was marked by the consolidation of the gains achieved during the previous phase, taking initiatives to set up many new industrial and other development projects, fighting the central policy makers on a number of policy issues which he perceived as being unjust to West Bengal, a failed attempt to unite Bihar and West Bengal as a united state in order to kill the acrimonious debates on territorial readjustment between the two states, further strengthening of his position as an elder statesman at the national level, and his hold over the West Bengal Congress, and a running on issues like food grains supply, refugee rehabilitation or price rise.

The victory of the Communists in China over the Kuomintang of Chiang Kai-Shek gave a new fillip to the Communists in our country who were fond of pointing to the Chinese model, comparing Nehru-Roy led Congress party with the KMT and forecasting that they would inevitably follow the road that Chiang Kai-Shek and his KMT took leaving the stage clear for the Communists in India. It was Dr. Roy's task to ensure that this did not happen, and he did so by concentrating on economic development and eradicating the serious unemployment problem.

Industrialization of West Bengal

From the very beginning of his stewardship of West Bengal, it was Dr. Roy's fond dream to transform West Bengal into an industrially prosperous state. Dr. Roy loved to think of big schemes, heavy industries, large-scale electrification, large and medium irrigation projects and so on. But at the same time he took keen interest in the success of the intensive agricultural development all over the state.

Proposal for an Oil Refinery

The question of setting up of an oil refinery at Budge Budge or any other appropriate place engaged his attention for some time. Both Burma Shell and Caltex had proposed setting up of their oil refinery in the eastern region, preferably in Calcutta. This proposal received much fillip with the discovery of crude in NaharKatia in Assam. An agitation was launched in Assam demanding the setting up of the refinery in Assam. The choice was whether to locate the refinery

near the-oil wells or near the principal market-place viz. Calcutta. Dr. Roy strongly supported the proposal to have this refinery in Calcutta, as it would lead to a new chain of chemical and petro-chemical industry and employment of technically qualified and managerial personnel on a large scale. However, with the controversy going on between Assam and West Bengal, and with the President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad's intervention, it was decided to locate this refinery at Barauni in Bihar. Dr. Roy's dream for a refinery was to materialize years later, when the Haldia Refinery came up during the seventies with support of Dr. Triguna Sen, Bidhan Roy loyalist, who was the Union Minister for Petroleum. Earlier Humayun Kabir, another Bidhan Roy loyalist, had as Union Minister for Chemicals promoted Haldia Fertilizer.

Himalayan Mountaineering Institute

On 25 June 1953, the Victors of Mount Everest, Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary called on Dr. Roy. The idea of establishing a mountaineering institute in Darjeeling had occurred to Dr. Roy and he immediately wrote to the Prime Minister requesting him to be the Chairman of the proposed institute with himself as the treasurer. It is no exaggeration to say, but for Dr. Roy, the institute could not have been established and started to function so quickly. Nehru became its President, and Dr. Roy the Vice-President. Such an institute was the first of its kind in India to create interest and enthusiasm among young men and women for mountaineering. Dr. Roy appointed Tenzing Norgay, one of the Everest heroes, as the Chief Instructor. Every year, a number of young people come out of the institute duly trained, and many of them are provided with employment in different organizations imparting training in mountaineering, in army, police and educational institutes etc.

Dr. Roy broke new ground by setting up a Banga Bhawan in Delhi, the first Chief Minister to do so, although he himself preferred to stay with a doctor friend in his private house at Ratendon Road and seldom stayed in the Banga Bhawan. In 1949, while attending an Indo-Pakistan Conference in Delhi he expressed the need for having a guest house at the national Capital, and as usual with him, promptly sent for property dealer and selected a property at Hailey Road. He himself coined the name Banga Bhawan. Other

states followed suit. During his stay in Delhi, just as he would spend a lot of time with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru or senior Ministers like Azad, Pant and Krishna Menon, he would also send for the concerned Deputy Secretary of a Ministry to the Banga Bhawan over a cup of tea and request him to clear particular proposals without creating any hitch. He would jokingly say “You should offer some flowers to every deity, big or small.” Invariably the concerned officials, after being spoken to by the great Bidhan Roy, would not stand in the way of an proposal concerning West Bengal. Indeed excellent human relations was the secret of Bidhan’s success in getting his proposals accepted through the endless bureaucratic layers in Delhi.

Subsidiary Port for Calcutta

Dr. Roy also seriously considered the opening up of a subsidiary port at Geonkhali to relieve the congestion in Calcutta port, and also to provide for easier transshipment of goods for export and import by linking Geonkhali with Kolaghat on the Bengal Nagpur Railway.

This also did not materialize until years later when the Haldia Port came up once again with the initial ground-work having been laid with Dr. Roy’s inspiration. Similarly, he tried for a barrage at Farraka to divert part of the Ganga water from the main river to the Bhagirathi channel so as to sustain the port of Calcutta, and to provide for easier communication between the physically separated northern part of West Bengal with southern districts. He urged for the transfer of some parts from adjoining Bihar so as to secure a corridor linking West Dinajpur district with Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and Cooch Behar districts. After a successful eye operation in Vienna, he visited various places in Europe working out several schemes for, among other things, better sewage disposal and sewage gas, establishment of coal tar plant and production of antibiotics.

At the annual Congress session held in Hyderabad in January 1953, Dr. Roy moved the resolution on communal amity and delivered a memorable speech condemning the activities of communal parties. He did not criticize any individual, but generally condemned communal organizations who were making the task of rehabilitation of refugees difficult. Both Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah were extremely critical

of Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee who wanted full integration of Kashmir into India. Shortly afterwards Shyama Prasad was arrested while trying to enter Jammu and Kashmir without the special permit and died under unfortunate circumstances on 23 June 1953 while in detention. This grieved Bidhan who was Shyama Prasad's close friend. This news also caused widespread anguish all over the country, especially West Bengal where the people's fury found reflection in throwing brickbats on the residence of Dr. Roy and the Congress Bhawan. It was on this occasion that Dr. Roy made a famous comment in a letter to Nehru :

I have begun to think that my house is a bigger martyr than myself because it has been exposed to attacks by the rival Congress Party in 1939, and subsequently by various groups - the Muslim League, the Communal groups and the communist groups and so on and so forth from time to time.⁸⁰

Abolition of the Zamindari System

Some of the important happenings during this period were the launching of India's First Five Year Plan which he enthusiastically supported, his taking the robe of Finance Minister on the death of his friend and colleague, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, and the Zamindari Act (1953), on 25 January 1953, which eliminated the interest of zamindars and other intermediaries on payment of compensation and provided for the State taking over the zamindari interest. This historic announcement ending Lord Cornwallis's Permanent Settlement of 1793 was made from Murshidabad, the 18th century capital of Bengal. There was also a supplementary Land Reform Bill which sought to protect the interests of small tenants and the share-croppers (Bhagchasis or Bargandars). Dr. Roy, in his generosity, saw to it that the magnificent palaces of the zamindars, which they were no longer able to maintain, were purchased by the Central Government, the State Government or other institutions. This also was the time when the Damodar Valley Corporation started its operation with the opening of Tilaiya Dam and the Thermal Power Plant at Bokaro on 21 February 1953. Both Dr. Roy and Prime Minister Nehru were present. The Damodar Valley

80. NMML Archives. New Delhi, Dr. B.C. Roy Papers.

Corporation set up on the model of the Tennessee Valley Authority of the U.S.A. was a unique organisation in which the Centre, the Bihar Government and the West Bengal Government held one third of the shares each. This was meant for comprehensive development of the Damodar Valley in terms of irrigation, flood control, power generation and limited inland navigation. Dr. Roy, along with Nehru, took personal interest in all stages of this project.

One Paisa Tram Fare Agitation

In between he had to face two large-scale Left-sponsored agitations, viz. the Tram Fare agitation of July 1953 and the Teachers' Strike agitation of February 1954. In the first one, the Communists and others mounted a large-scale movement of protesting against the upward revision of the second class tram fare by one paisa by the foreign-controlled Calcutta Tramway Company. Many opposition MLAs and leaders, including Jyoti Basu had to be arrested, but the Tram Fare Increase Resistance Committee intensified their agitation taking advantage of the fact that the Chief Minister had to leave for Europe on 5 July 1953. The agitation ended only when the Government advised the Tramways authorities as demanded by the agitationists to refer the question of enhancement of the second class fare to a tribunal headed by Justice Prashanta Bhushan Mukherjee. Dr. Roy had to go to the extraordinary length of personally talking to Suresh Chandra Mazumdar of *Ananda Bazar Patrika* and Tushar Kanti Ghosh of *Amrita Bazar Patrika* in trying to soften the injured feelings of the pressmen who had been assaulted during the agitation by the police. The agitation over the teachers' strike in the February of the next year followed the same pattern. Dr. Roy's personal handling eased the situation.

Dr. Roy was for ever engaged in planning and executing big schemes in diverse fields for the development of Calcutta and West Bengal and for relieving unemployment. The Durgapur Project with coke oven plant was thought of during this year. It was to complement the establishment of the Durgapur Steel Plant, the third public sector Steel Plant in India with British assistance. Another highly imaginative scheme related to reclamation of a huge marshy area to the East and North-East of Calcutta, popularly called the Salt Lake, with

silt deposit drawn from the Hooghly River while dredging the river. The project Haringhatia Milk Scheme on the model of Mumbai's Aarey Milk Colony, at Belalgachia near Calcutta and the commissioning of the Chittaranjan Loco Works were also landmark events.

Railway Reorganization

A serious problem he had to face was over the Centre's decision to regroup the Indian Railway system on the zonal pattern. On 14 April 1954, Prime Minister Nehru inaugurated the Northern Railways, the North-Eastern Railways and Eastern Railways. The earlier East Indian Railways (EIR) straight from Howrah up to Delhi and beyond became substantially truncated as a result of this new re-organisation. Although Calcutta remained the headquarters of the new Eastern Railway, its jurisdiction could not go beyond Allahabad. There was a feeling that Railway Minister, Gopalaswamy Iyengar, was trying to please Nehru and the people of U.P. by taking away Allahabad Division from the Eastern Railway and adding it to the Northern Railways. There was a strong reaction in West Bengal and Dr. Roy had to voice their feelings even by clashing with Gopalaswamy Iyengar at a meeting in Delhi and walking out of it. Bengal observed a complete Hartal against the whole package. Subsequently, after Iyengar was succeeded by Lal Bahadur Shastri, the new Railway Minister tried to assuage West Bengal's feelings by establishing a marshalling yard at Mughal Sarai by adding the Sealdah Division to the Eastern Railway, and by reviving the old Bengal Nagpur Railway up to Nagpur and Waltair under the new name, viz. South Eastern Railway.

Darjeeling Himalayan Railway

He was also successful in keeping alive the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, an engineering marvel in the face of opposition from the Railway Board which had proposed to dismantle DHR on the ground of its high maintenance costs. West Bengal Government vehemently objected, but the Railway Board stuck to its decision. Dr. Roy urged upon the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to prevail upon the Board to give up their plan.

According to Dr. Roy the superb engineering skill in the construction of the hill railway should be preserved as a lesson to

the posterity to emulate. The closure would add to the already large number of unemployed in Darjeeling district. There would be a reduction in the number of tourists due to the inconvenience of travelling and carrying heavy loads upto the hills and thus adversely affect the local market of cottage and small scale industries resulting in the break down of the already crippled economy in the hills. If high maintenance cost was an issue, in that case “why not stop maintaining the Taj Mahal?” Prime Minister dropped the proposal of the Railway Minister.

Conceiving of Durgapur Region as an Industrial Hub

Endowed with uncommon foresight Dr. Roy conceived of the plan of turning the Durgapur-Asansol-Dhanbad region into the ‘Ruhr’ valley of West Germany. He was tremendously impressed with all that he saw in Germany and made contact with experts to help implement his schemes. His active mind flowed in different directions and refused to dwell on routine matters of administration of the state of West Bengal. He realized that for the truncated state it was not possible to prosper unless a number of industries were set up simultaneously. Durgapur was then a large tract of land full of dense forests sprawling on both sides of the Grand Trunk Road. In fact this belt along the Grand Trunk Road was called the Durgapur Jungles. In those days people in the neighbourhood feared to enter the forest even during day not only because of the depredation of wild animals but also for attacks by robbers. Dr. Roy saw the rich potential of this region. He started collecting all relevant data on the prospects of establishing in that region some heavy industrial units including a steel factory and a coke oven plant. He was encouraged by the fact that coal and other minerals were easily available from the neighbouring mining areas of Asansol, Jharia and Ranigunge. The Thermal Power Station of the Damodar Valley Corporation was to supply power. The Durgapur barrage across the Damodar river and the railway head were all distinct advantages for laying of the infrastructure of the Durgapur Industrial Complex. He also took into account that it would not be necessary to evict a large number of people from this inhospitable land. Both local and the foreign expertise unhesitatingly encouraged him to undertake a gigantic industrial development programme in Durgapur which became a standing monument of his many faceted constructive genius.

The location for the steel plant was selected by Dr. Roy as there was scope of sufficient water, coal, transport and other facilities. There was a tussle between Durgapur in West Bengal and Bokaro in Bihar. To weigh the advantages between the two Dr. Roy invited the Director General of Geological Survey of India to give his expert opinion and he recommended Durgapur. Though it cannot be denied that Dr. Roy's closeness to Jawaharlal Nehru counted much in favour of Durgapur, yet Dr. Roy was not complacent. He sent S.N. Roy, Chief Secretary to Delhi to be present to provide any information at different stages of discussion before the final decision was taken.

Dr. Roy's plan was that in Durgapur both private and public sector industries would grow up side by side. Though he did not live long to see his dream fulfilled in time, any one coming to Durgapur would be amazed at the growth of one of the largest industrial complexes within such a comparatively short span of time. After the frustration over the Centre's refusal to B.M. Birla's scheme for Birla Steel Plant at Durgapur following the Industrial Policy Resolution, 1956, which reserved steel for the public sector, Dr. Roy persuaded the Centre to accept Durgapur as the site for a public sector steel plant with British assistance. The result was the Durgapur Steel Plant. Durgapur was selected as the best site by the British Steel Mission and Nehru and the Union Steel Minister, T.T. Krishnamachari gave enthusiastic support. Dr. Roy gave all necessary help and the project was commissioned in 1956. Durgapur Steel, together with Durgapur Projects, the Alloy Steel and the D.V.C. power station helped fulfilling Dr. Roy's dream of turning the steel and coal belt of Bihar and West Bengal into India's Ruhr Valley.

When work was on a full swing in constructing Durgapur industrial township it was found that a spacious highway was necessary to connect the township with Durgapur railway station. Dr. B.C. Roy held a meeting of the heads of all the agencies concerned and directed that a four-lane highway should be constructed from the G.T. Road to Durgapur railway station, crossing the railway line on an over bridge and that it could further be connected with the Durgapur Barrage so that it would also be a straighter road to Bankura. The total construction cost was apportioned to all the concerned agencies like West Bengal PWD, Durgapur Project Limited, Railways and the

Durgapur Steel Plant. The Durgapur Steel Plant was unwilling to meet one-third of the cost of the construction of the over bridge on the ground that the Central Government was not releasing funds. On being told about this, the Chief Minister became furious and straightaway telephoned the Union Finance Minister, T.T. Krishnamachari, in Delhi and told him, “you leaders from the Centre are sucking all the honey from West Bengal but are not willing to give anything in return and raise all kinds of explanations. Things cannot go on like this. I am reporting the matter to Jawahar.” T.T. Krishnamachari agreed to meet the cost of this project as apportioned during the telephone conversation.⁸¹

Several other projects in different fields owe their origin to Dr. Roy’s initiative and foresight. As noted by Chakraborty, his biographer, years after his death, a successor Chief Minister while going through old files noted with amazement that almost each and every project for the development of the state owed its origin to his initiative. How could he find the time to devote to so many projects? The answer is quite simple. He was fired by an inner strength stemming from his keen desire to lay the foundation for the prosperity of the truncated state of West Bengal.

Private Sector Industries

Dr. Roy’s plan to make West Bengal develop rapidly so far as commerce and industry were concerned prompted him to take the help of several well-known industrialists to establish more industries in West Bengal in collaboration with the government. They were also expected to advise and help the government in setting up different public sector industries which commended high employment potential. During his visit to Europe and America for his eye operation he seized the opportunity and spent much time and energy to discuss the matter with some of the industrialists in those countries who were interested to come to India and set up plants in collaboration with government. His intention had always been that the public and private sectors should exist side by side which would create a spirit of healthy competition and cooperation. The development and prosperity of West Bengal was foremost in his mind and to achieve that, he never hesitated to utilize services of any industrialist, local or foreign who he thought would serve the purpose.

81. Recollection of Shri H. Sengupta, the then Chief Engineer, Durgapur Project Ltd.

Dr. Roy was almost like a family physician to most of the industrialists and businessmen in the country. Their families had benefited by his medical advice and treatment for years. When he approached them for such assistance, they readily agreed to his proposals. Dr. Roy was a shrewd judge of man and to him efficiency and hard work were the criteria of an able administrator and he placed men who had such qualities at the helm of affairs in different units and also consulted those who had been running different industries in the country.

To give just one example, of how he systematically strove to attract private investments in West Bengal, M/s Babcock and Wilcox, a leading boiler manufacturing company of UK had their India office in Calcutta from pre-Independence times. Around 1948 there was a proposal to have a collaboration between this company and ACC, and it was decided that this new company to be named ACC Vickers Babcock Limited, would set up a plant in Mumbai area. On hearing of this news Dr. Roy called Mr. Donelly, the head of M/s Babcock Ltd. in India to Writers Building for a courtesy call and requested that before they made their final selection he should visit a site in West Bengal with excellent communication facilities, vast winter-land and the proximity of a steel plant. Mr. Donelly accepted this suggestion and visited Durgapur, accompanied by some government officials. He was highly impressed with the industrial prospects of Durgapur and decided to locate the proposed new plant there. This was the origin of ACC Vickers Babcock in Durgapur. Out of the land allocated for this project Mr. Donelly earmarked a position for establishing a missionary school viz., St. Xavier's School which stands even today.⁸²

When Durgapur was selected as the site for the new steel plant he selected Shri K. Sen, ICS from West Bengal as the head of the Durgapur Steel Plant and was also in a regular contact with Bell, the representative of the British Consortium which was assisting the building of the steel plant. He used to hold regular meetings with Bell and Sen regarding the progress of the construction of this plant and the obstacles which were coming in the way which he tried his very best to solve. He contacted various industrial houses both at home and

82. Reminiscences conveyed in a letter to the author by Dr. Hirak Kumar Guha, Calcutta.

abroad to locate new plants in this industrial belt. Examples were Philips Carbon Black and T.K. Aluminium. Similarly he persuaded various Central Ministers to locate their new projects here. Examples were Bharat Ophthalmic Glass, Durgapur Fertilizer, Mining and Allied Machineries Company and Alloy Steel Plant. The State Government also pitched in with some of its own projects such as Durgapur Chemicals, and Durgapur Coke Oven.

Indeed, by the year 1962 Durgapur - Dhanbad region did look like developing into one of the best industrial belts in the world. Unfortunately, Bidhan Chandra's life was to be snatched away by that time and thereafter things only languished, precipitated by aggressive trade unionism that developed all around from the late 1960s onwards. From around 1967 production in most of the plants sharply fell below normal on account of chronic industrial unrest which again spurred industrial sickness. Thus the pace of growth of this region had not been what one would have expected.

Bidhan's great vision and single-minded devotion were not equally shared by those who followed him as Chief Minister of West Bengal, with the result that what was a prosperous industrial belt thriving with activities has generally declined thereafter.

Dr. Roy took particular care to see that the setting up of big industries did not disturb the agricultural pattern of the rural areas. One has only to look at Durgapur area and to see how hardly any agricultural land was acquired, when so many giant industries started coming up. His concern for the economic growth of the rural people would be borne out by the fact that Zamindari Abolition Act, Land Reform Act and later Panchayat Act, and the Rural Health Centre were all calculated to bring about a comprehensive improvement of life and living of rural people. The development of Haringhata farm, the establishment of agricultural oriented Kalyani University, the supply of agricultural inputs to farmers etc. no doubt proved the fallacy of the criticism made against him that he essentially cared for city-dwellers, and not villagers. In fact, it would be correct to say that it was on the legal framework created in Dr. Roy's time that the much-hyped land redistribution programme in villages was brought about by the Left Front Government in the late 1970s.

Congress Session at Kalyani and Development of Township

During the Second World War Kalyani-Chandamari-Kancharapara area was converted into a huge American military base to wage an all out offensive against Japan. The air base was termed 'Roosevelt Town'. The big army hospital there was taken over by West Bengal government and developed into the present day Kancharapara TB hospital. Due to the extraordinary foresight of Dr. Roy the abandoned area formed the nucleus of Kalyani township known as Dr. Roy's brain child. His mind was preoccupied with the ever increasing pressure of population of Calcutta and other problems arising out of it. He pondered over it and was convinced that the only way out was to build satellite towns attracting people to move there out of the metropolis. The area over 4000 acres of the land was taken over and divided into four zones. Block A and B were reserved for residential purposes. The Kalyani University provided facilities for arts, science and agriculture studies. Kalyani has a 500 bedded hospital and a 250 bedded ESI hospital.

A man of remarkable vision, Dr. Roy thought it would give a tremendous fillip to the development of Kalyani if the next plenary meeting of the Congress Party could be held at Kalyani. People all over including the front rank leaders of India would come to attend the session and that would make everyone realise the immense potentiality of the new township. As soon as the idea crystallized in his mind he got in a touch with Pandit Nehru and other leaders and was successful in obtaining their consent to his proposal. All resources were mobilized on the development of the new township. A new railway line from Kancharapara to Kalyani was laid down, buildings started coming up, and roads and underground sewerages and other amenities were provided with surprising speed. The 59th session of the Congress attracted huge crowds from all around and was a major landmark in West Bengal's recovery.

Haringhata Farm

The Australian Governor of Bengal during the War, Richard Casey had studied some of the basic problems of Bengal among which he gave high priority to farming and augmenting the supply of

milk and milk products to the teeming population of Calcutta. At his initiative Australian experts together with the State Agriculture Secretary K.Sen, ICS, the Milk Commissioner L.C.Sikka and H.M.Patel, I.C.S. Secretary to Government of India had selected Haringhata in Nadia District to be a suitable place for establishing a model farm and a centre for live stock improvement with ancillary projects. An area of 3080 acres was initially acquired. It was Dr.Roy who gave concrete shape to the project at Haringhata conceived by Lord Casey. By his drive, imagination and leadership he was able to turn Haringhat into a model farm with modern expertise and it became one of the living symbols of his versatile genius. This was combined with the plan to remove the small colonies of milch cows within the city colloquially called “Khataals”.

Reclamation of Salt Lake

Dr. Roy was desperately looking for suitable land for the expansion of the city of Calcutta bursting to its seams with its burgeoning population. The vast expanse of marshy land full of weeds, shrubs and infested with reptiles and other wild animals and the favourite haunt of criminals known as the Salt Lake attracted his ever watchful eyes. He had a rapid survey made and decided that there being hardly any scope for the development of the city excepting in the eastern periphery, a scheme should be prepared for the expansion of the city on that direction. After seeing for himself similar schemes being implemented in Holland and other developed countries he had the expert advice of specialists, both from Holland and Yugoslavia together with local expertise of the State government's irrigation department and gave green signal to go ahead with the Salt Lake reclamation scheme by the Irrigation Department of the State Government headed by the Secretary, A.D. Khan, ICS. The Salt Lake Scheme was created by him to provide adequate facilities to the middle class families, though he did not live long enough to see for himself the fulfilment of his desire . The silt and mud dredged out from the river Hooghly was pumped by the hydraulic method through huge pipe lines to fill up this marshy land measuring about 5.5 sq. miles in area with the ultimate object to transform the land fit for habitation. The original estimated cost of the project was Rs. twenty crore. This vast area aptly named ‘Bidhan

Nagar' later on was rapidly growing into not only a favourite township for residential purpose, but for the establishment of official and non-official institutions and for new industries. It grew with all modern amenities in a planned manner and in a few years under the name Bidhan Nagar it became one of the most attractive and developed suburbs with immense potential for further expansion in the vicinity of the metropolitan city of Calcutta. In Dr. Roy's conception this new township was meant for settling middle and lower income groups, although under his successors, it was the affluent sections who became the main beneficiaries.

Differences with Nehru and Mahalanobis on Planning

A forgotten but highly interesting episode from mid-1955 was the B.C. Roy - Mahalanobis controversy on approach to planning. This was the time of the framing of the Second Five Year Plan. With P.C. Mahalanobis as the moving spirit and Prime Minister Nehru being solidly behind him, the Plan model was strongly influenced by the Soviet Planning model with its emphasis on creating basic and heavy industries and financing this by curtailing consumption. Bidhan with his native instinct and knowledge of grass roots economic conditions chose to cross swords with the internationally famous statistician with his sophisticated econometric models. On 29 May 1955 Nehru had circulated a note to all State Governments, parts of which are extracted below.

New Delhi

The 29th May, 1955

Forwarded with the compliments
of the Prime Minister

Dr. B.C. Roy

Chief Minister of West Bengal

Note on Planning

Of course, in planning there can be no finality and there is likely to be constant revision of the details in the plan as further information comes in. When the First Five Year plan was prepared, the data available

was very limited. Now we have not only the experience of the working of the First Five Year plan, but we have much more data and statistics. Even now, this information is far from adequate and it is added to from time to time.

Planning thus becomes a continuous process based on additional information and experience. It must have however, a definite objective and target. The broad objective has been laid down to be the realisation of a socialist pattern of society. The narrower objective is to increase production, raise standards and progressively lessen unemployment. It is hoped that by the end of the Third Five Year Plan, that is, in about ten or eleven years time, we shall be able to deal adequately with the enormous unemployment problem that we are facing today and practically put an end to it.

This is a very ambitious objective to keep before us. But we feel that we can do it, provided of course that we work hard and plan carefully.

Planning is of course not merely giving a list of projects and schemes and priorities. It is something much more intricate and complicated and has to balance the various activities of the nation. Production and consumption have to be balanced. The tackling of the unemployment problem has always to be kept in view as a very immediate objective. All this requires full statistics and calculations not only about production but also of increased consumption as standards rise and, above all, about the additional employment created.

You will see that great stress is laid on two factors: The growth of heavy industry to produce capital goods and the wide expansion of village industries for consumer goods.⁸³

83. Chakraborty S. op cit p. 172-73

In June Dr. Roy sent his views to the Planning Commission in two separate notes, which indicated that he held different views about the framework of the Plan. He held the view that:

There need be no compulsion to reduce consumption or to ration the use of consumer goods in order to develop heavy industries and factories for turning out producer goods. The starting base from which the Second Plan is to be worked out will be the pattern of rural development as envisaged in the N.E. and C.D.P. programmes. The main purpose of the plan is to develop the country in a balanced manner. We cannot increase consumption without increasing production.

In his reckoning industrial development should follow agricultural development out of the surplus generated in the latter sector. Nor was he for clamping all out import restriction :

It might be possible to increase production to a certain extent in this underdeveloped country (at the time of the Second Plan the planners termed India as an underdeveloped country but during and after the Fourth Plan the country passed through that phase and India is now a developing country) by utilising the manpower and machine power both in the rural and urban areas. This increased production will naturally make it possible to increase consumption if the people have the means with which to buy. Therefore, planning should aim at increasing power and capacity of the people to buy, i.e. to increase employment at the same time that production is increased. By utilising the idle capacity we may without increasing investment increase production to a limited extent in the first instance. This should be done.⁸⁴

He gave the following five points to make the plan a success:

84. Ibid, p. 73.

- (a) The plan of development of a country and its people must be such that the common man realises that the plan is being devised for improvement of his lot. He will then cooperate and contribute materially in labour and money to implement the plan.
- (b) The total requirements in heavy capital goods or producer goods needed for the country are to be calculated by estimates framed on the basis of the plan for developing the villages. It would be more realistic than the plan frame made by the economists and statisticians of the Planning Commission where targets are placed first and assessment of resources made afterwards.
- (c) The extent to which consumer goods are to be produced, whether in factories or in villages, whether by the private sector or by the public sector, can be easily computed. There need be no compulsion to reduce consumption or to ration the use of consumer goods for turning out producer goods.
- (d) Planning should be a continuous process, not merely limited to a number of years. It is, therefore, possible if we commence from below, to adjust the pace at any stage of development according to resources, and
- (e) The West Bengal Government, as its scheme will show, is conscious of the need to develop heavy industries and put up large-scale installations in many fields. It is no less concerned about the necessity of exploring all possible avenues for raising further resources for development through taxation. Two facts must, however, be borne in mind; the installation of heavy plants must be linked with the needs of the people; secondly, taxation proposals in a democratic country must be such as will secure the largest amount of acquiescence on the part of those who will be affected by the proposals.

Yet in another note Dr. Roy sharply criticized the framework of the Second Five Year Plan as “impractical”, both in regard to the total effort which it envisages as well as the manner in which the total effort is proposed to be applied in different directions. His two broad criticisms of the Mahalanobis model contained in the note were that :

the total strain involved will be beyond our capacity to bear particularly in view of the fact that the most important element in assessing the capacity in democratic planning is the willingness of different sections of the people themselves to undergo this strain. The different major heads under which this effort is to be made will lead to lopsided development, thus seriously injuring the prospect of balanced growth.

Analyzing the basic recommendations contained in the plan papers Dr. Roy said, "It must be admitted that the entire approach in these calculations is an example of putting the cart before the horse. The level of our targets should be pitched according to capacity, and not according to what we may wish for."

In retrospect, there seems to have been considerable force in Bidhan's common sense point of view. If Nehru and Mahalanobis had heeded to it and not gone overboard in copying the Soviet style centralized planning, our economic development might have been more steady, although slower and a whole generation of Indians would not be subjected to privation and scarcity. But, as in politics so in economics, Bidhan only expressed his own views in a couple of select gatherings in New Delhi and Calcutta and did not turn this difference into a polemic. He was overruled by Nehru and Mahalanobis, and he submitted to the majority opinion. Half a century later, with the advantage of hindsight, and seeing the way centralized Soviet style planning had not brought out the desired result history would perhaps be kind to Bidhan's robust, humanistic common sense approach to planning.

Meanwhile, on 3 January 1954, he laid the foundation stone of the Haringhata Milk Colony on the model of the Aarey Milk Colony of Mumbai. This also meant the removal of the milkmen's establishments in Calcutta city popularly called *khatahs* which were health hazards. Three days later, on the occasion of the Chittaranjan Locomotive Works turning out the 100th locomotive, he along with Railway Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, journeyed to Chittaranjan. In his speech he recalled how armed Santhals had chased away the survey team

years ago when they had gone to take possession of the land offered to the Railways by the State Government and how he had to rush to the spot to pacify them by promising not only land for their rehabilitation in the neighbouring areas, but also jobs in the new factory.^{84a} The town had been named Chittaranjan at the instance of Dr. Roy to commemorate his political mentor.

Teacher's Strike

Shortly thereafter, on 16 February, Calcutta burst into one of the worst riotings on the issue of secondary teachers' strike. As a section of the striking teachers tried to break the police cordon around the prohibited zone of the Dalhousie Square the military had to be called in to restore order. In course of the discussions on an adjournment motion in the Assembly, the first one in this house after Independence, Bidhan made a prophetic remark, "There is possibility of West Bengal Secondary School teachers being held to ransom by the very students upon whom they depend for assistance in their agitation against the Government."⁸⁵ As in the case of the tramways fare agitation of the previous year, it was Dr. Roy's personal handling of the issues that eased the situation.

Goodwill Visit of Fazlul Huq From Dhaka

On 2 May he had a memorable meeting at Writers' Building with A.K. Fazlul Huq, the former Premier of undivided Bengal who had trounced the Muslim League in the elections held in East Pakistan (1954) at the head of a coalition which included Suhrawardy's Awami League, the followers of Maulana Bhasani and his own Krishak Praja Party. It was an emotional meeting in Writers' Building between two old friends who held identical views on the resumption of normal border trade between the two Bengals and the withdrawal of the visa system. Emerging from the conference room at the Writers' Building, Fazlul Huq made the following statement to the waiting press:

I realize that for a better understanding between the peoples of two Bengals it is necessary that all barriers which prevent free intercourse between them

84a. Ibid, p. 174-75.

85. Ibid, p. 174-75

should be removed. I am determined to do my best, and with the cooperation of West Bengal I hope I shall be able to achieve some useful results.

Referring to protection of minority he stated :

I assure my Hindu and Muslim brethren in both Bengals that I shall do my utmost to serve the interests of the minority community in order that all sections of the people may feel secure and enjoy equal rights and privileges as inhabitants of a common mother country. As a step in that direction, I shall have at least two Hindu Ministers in my Cabinet.

That Huq was not satisfied with the division of Bengal was evident from another significant utterance which he made in one of his speeches in Calcutta: "I hope with the help of the people of India to remove the artificial barrier that had been created between the two Bengals"⁸⁶ Unfortunately, the outspoken nature of Huq's utterances, in particular his demand for autonomy leaving only foreign affairs, defence and currency to the Centre, was too much for the West Pakistan rulers to accept and on 30 May Huq's Ministry was dismissed by Karachi and the Central Government of Pakistan took over East Bengal's administration. Dr. Roy's fond hopes of normalization of relations between the two Bengals remained unrealized.

The merger of the French possession of Chandernagore with West Bengal on 2 October 1954 was yet another triumph for Dr. Roy in his delicate negotiation with the Central Government. Side by side he was all along pressing the Central Government and the Planning Commission for larger allocation of plan assistance to meet West Bengal's special needs. He was also persuading the Centre to approve locating a coke oven plant, a power plant and a pig iron plant (collectively called the Durgapur Projects) at Durgapur. A series of correspondence was exchanged between the Central and State Governments and valuable time was lost. Some time in October 1954 the Chief Minister wrote to the Prime Minister about his pet Durgapur scheme. In November 1954 he followed it up by saying that

86. Ibid.

“development of Durgapur is the only means by which this State can recover from its difficult position, both in regard to finance and employment. The project, when completed, will employ 12,000 people”. He then went on, “But it is unfortunate that somehow or other neither the Planning Commission nor the Production Ministry are helpful in the matter, although I have assured them that we do not want any monetary help from the Central Government for the development of this project.”⁸⁷

The main points advanced by Dr. Roy for development of Durgapur as a new industrial base were that “the area was on the railway line, and is also on the bank of a navigational canal providing cheap transport from the area up to the river Hooghly and is also on the Grand Trunk Road.” The proposal of a gas grid for transmission of surplus gas from the coke oven plant was also there.

The opening of the new Secretariat Building on the Strand Road overlooking the Hoogly River on 4 September 1954 was also a major achievement. Other landmark events of the period were the G.D. Birla College of Engineering (1954) subsequently renamed, Kalyani University.

But Calcutta even in 1955 was, so to say, sitting on a volcano. Dr. Roy’s perception is well-expressed in his letter to Nehru of 12 January 1955 in reply to Nehru’s letter of 10 January. That letter had mentioned the Editor of *The Statesman*, G.A. Johnson’s remarks to him a few days ago about Calcutta and its troubles, the rumblings below the surface and the occasional explosions, and how in this terribly over-crowded city, with crowds of the unemployed, living on the brink of trouble, crowds gather at the slightest provocation and sometimes do what they like. Bidhan’s reply dated the 12 January 1955 was prompt and graphic. The letter is reproduced below:

You letter dated the 10th of January refers to your conversation with Mr. Johnson in the course of which he expressed apprehension regarding the situation in Bengal and in Calcutta in particular. The situation is well-known to us and is mainly created by

87.Ibid, p. 155-56.

the large number of unemployed youths in Calcutta and the urban areas. A recent statistical survey shows that in Calcutta there are 2,34,000 persons, of whom 80 percent are Bengalees who have no full-time employment but are seeking the same. Of this figure, 1,36,500 belong to middle class and 97,600 belong to the working classes. Of the 2,34,000 persons about 70,000 are refugees. Quite a large proportion of the middle class, about 80 percent are literate; a large number of them have also some technical skill and knowledge for handicraft work. This is the main problem of Calcutta.

There is also the problem of refugees, which I feel convinced will fare better under the new arrangements and which I think will have a humane approach.

Do you realise now why since 1949 I have been going ahead with my development schemes in spite of the financial handicap of the State. Until today our expenditure scale exceeds our receipts by nearly Rs. 10 crores. In 1949 I had received Rs. 90 lakhs from the Centre for dispersal of college students to districts. These colleges in the districts are doing very good work. I have increased the salary of the primary school teachers from Rs. 8-10 a month to Rs. 25 to Rs. 30 per month during the course of four years. I have increased the dearness allowance of secondary school teachers by nearly 75 percent. As you know, I have been considering further development in the education sphere and to disperse some students to Kalyani.

During the last five years I have been putting up a network of electricity schemes in Bengal. The current is partly received from the Damodar Valley Corporation, partly from the Mayurakshi and partly from the Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation. I have very nearly covered the whole of Southern Bengal

including the rural areas. I did it with a purpose. I know that 70 percent of the agriculturists in West Bengal have uneconomic holdings. I know also that the Communists have got some hold on the rural areas because of this uneconomic position of the agriculturists. I have, therefore, planned to put up small industries and cottage industries to be served by power. Time has now come for me to put up these small units and I am doing so gradually but small industries can only be run as ancillary to large industries. I am therefore asking you to help me in giving practical shape to my Durgapur scheme. Although a coke oven plant under the Industries Development and Regulation Act of 1951 requires the sanction of the Union Government before any State can start such a scheme, I have been waiting patiently for the last year and a half to get this approved but on some pretext or other the necessary sanction has been withheld. I think we have furnished all the information that they wanted. The present position is that the area where we want to set up this scheme is the place, which is about to be vacated by the Damodar Valley Corporation where they have built up 300 bungalows, small and big. We want to take them over for the Durgapur scheme which would employ about 12,000 persons primarily and eventually a much larger number. One of the primary objects of my Durgapur scheme is to try and have by-products from distillation of coal tar. I know that this is a form of development in which the middle class unemployed would be very interested.

I am perfectly sure this State can only be saved if we have a network of industries, small and big. I have not got much resource for any big industry but one or two big industries with smaller ancillary industries are what we should develop if we want to save this State. With this hope I have been taking enormous care in

developing our schemes of Community Development Projects, the National Extension Blocks and other sources of welfare schemes. I feel now that the atmosphere is changing and that the people are prepared to co-operate. Once I have the co-operation of the people I am not afraid of the situation getting out of hand.

So far as the situation in Calcutta is concerned, I am quite alive to it but I am vain enough to think that I can control it in spite of recent weakness and illness provided you help me. I am better now.⁸⁸

States Reorganization Imbrolio 1956

One of the biggest challenges Dr. Roy faced in his life was in 1956, over the States Reorganization issue. When Bihar and Orissa were separated from Bengal in 1911 substantial Bengali speaking areas including the districts of Manbhum and Dholbhum and portions of Santhal Parganas and Purnea were left in Bihar. The issue of uniting them with Bengal had been raging ever since. After the 1947 partition, it acquired yet another dimension, that of adding some Bihar territories with truncated West Bengal so as to give this State a territorial contiguity. The appointment of the States Reorganization Commission with Justice Fazal Ali as Chairman and K.M. Panikkar and Dr. H. N. Kunzru as Members to report on all such cases of boundary disputed among states rekindled this issue. Bihar also had her counter-claims. West Bengal also had claims on parts of Assam's Goalpara district. There was also a faint demand for creating a Uttrakhand State consisting of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar. Dr. Roy appeared before the States Reorganization Commission several times to express West Bengal's point of view. His evidence showed meticulous care in marshalling facts and figures, keen understanding of the issues shorn of any emotion and practical suggestions. The States Reorganization Commission submitted its 300 page report on 30 September, 1955. The report recommended the following measures as far as West Bengal was concerned :

1. Transfer of the Purulia subdivision of Manbhum district with the exception of Chas Thana to West Bengal.

88. NMML. Dr. B.C. Roy papers.

2. The transfer of a part of Kishanganj sub-division which is to the east of the river Mahananda; and
3. The transfer of the Gopalpur riverine Thana contiguous to Kishanganj and extending up to the National Highway to West Bengal.

West Bengal's area would now be 34,590 sq. miles, and its population 265 million. The territory would increase by 3,812 kilometres and her population by about 1.7 million.

But this became an emotive issue both in West Bengal and Bihar. There were demonstrations in the border areas of Bihar. To save the situation Dr. Roy, with the support of Dr. Sri Krishna Sinha, Chief Minister of Bihar, came out with an unorthodox solution viz. the merger of West Bengal and Bihar thus reversing the dangerous trend towards linguistic fragmentation. They issued a historic joint statement on 23 January 1956. It stated, among other things :

We propose that the two states should be merged one with the other to form one single State. It was not very long ago that Bengal and Bihar were parts of one State. It should not be difficult to create an atmosphere of happy voluntary merger. There is no question in this of either State having to submit to any decision imposed upon it but rather of their own free will to come to this important decision which we know will be beneficial to the two States and will lead to a larger life and greater prosperity. From the economic point of view and Five Year Plans it will also be easier to plan for progress for these two areas. In particular, this will be a significant example of that positive approach to the problem of Indian unity to which reference has been made by the Congress Working Committee resolution.

While we have made this proposal and express our agreement to the merger of the two States of Bihar and West Bengal in full confidence of its acceptance by the people concerned, it is clear that the details of it

will have to be carefully worked out. The people concerned will have to be consulted and an atmosphere of voluntary cooperation and reunion has to be created.

To that end we intend to devote ourselves immediately. We trust that the Government of India will give us their cooperation in this great task.⁸⁹

This proposal was hailed by Prime Minister Nehru as “The Great Lead” and had a mixed reaction in both West Bengal and Bihar. But it was opposed tooth and nail by the Leftist opposition in West Bengal. Many Congressmen also opposed it. What took the people by surprise was the sudden and unilateral nature of the announcement. Both the Bihar and the West Bengal Assemblies supported this proposal. The Leftist-sponsored Anti-Merger Committee declared a bandh on 24 February but Dr. Roy scuttled this move by persuading over 100 Congress MLAs to stay at the Assembly building and the Ministers’ quarters at Raj Bhawan on the previous day. Clearly, on this issue Dr. Roy was losing his popularity. Wherever he went he was greeted by demonstrators with slogans such as “Bengal is being sold to Bihar by its own Chief Minister” or “Down with Bidhan Roy”.⁹⁰

In popular perception it was Dr. Roy who was the author of this merger proposal while, according to Dr. Roy himself, Dr. Sri Krishna Sinha, Chief Minister of Bihar proposed it and Dr. Roy enthusiastically gave his support.⁹¹ But Dr. Roy was able to obtain support of the majority out of 171 Congress members in the West Bengal Assembly. The Chief Minister, who was continually under pressure from opposition to the ‘merger’ quietly prepared a new formula of ‘union’ (not merger) of West Bengal with Bihar and got this approved by the WBPCC. The broad features of the ‘United States of Bengal and Bihar’ as evolved by the West Bengal Chief Minister reported to be under the advice of Shri Sankar Prasad Mitra, a Congress leader, a Minister and Chief justice of Calcutta High Court⁹² were as follows:

89. Chakraborty S. My Years with Dr. B.C. Roy Calcutta 1982, pp 192-193.

90. S. Chakraborty with Dr. B.C. Roy and other Chief Minister (p. 301-325).

91. Chakraborty S. My days with Dr. B.C. Roy and other Chief Minister (301-325).

92. Ibid p. 301.

1. The United States may be called “The United States of West Bengal and Bihar” like the States of Travancore and Cochin.
2. There should be an assurance that the culture and the language of each State should be protected, that the United States will have two official languages, Bengali and Hindi. Both the languages will be official for the entire State.
3. No such union would be viable if there is any attempt on the part of one state to dominate over the other. In many ways each state will continue its own life subject to a common approach to major problems.
4. In this United State there should be one Governor and one Public Service Commission.
5. There will be one Cabinet and one legislature. In addition to the Chief Minister belonging to one region, it may be desirable to have a Deputy Chief Minister belonging to the other region. A convention may grow for the Chief Minister to be chosen alternatively from the two regions.
6. There might be two Regional Councils, one for each of the major language areas.
7. Generally speaking, therefore, the internal structure of the two regions should continue as it is and would not be interfered with.
8. It is obvious that the principal capital of the State should be Calcutta. Patna may be a second capital and the legislature may meet in either place.

This proposal for a united state of two states was an innovative one, and if accepted might have provided a model for other states in special situations to come together for limited purposes, say the North-Eastern states. But the anti-merger agitation went on gathering strength like a snowball. In between Dr. Roy found time to visit IIT Kharagpur to attend its very first convocation inspite of being preoccupied with these pressing political problems along with Prime Minister Nehru. This is a perfect example of showing how he would never allow any one concern to engross his complete attention and could simultaneously deal with several matters or issues giving them equal importance.

A parliamentary by-election was due in West Bengal in the North Calcutta constituency. Dr. Roy chose for this seat Ashok Sen, a well-known barrister of the Calcutta High Court, who was to become subsequently a Union Minister for a long time. The anti-merger committee of the Leftists set up Mohit Mitra, a journalist and former associate of Sarat Chandra Bose, but now almost turned a Communist. The leftists and other anti-merger groups made it quite clear that the Calcutta North constituency election was going to be a virtual referendum on the merger. In the election held on 1 May 1956 Mohit Mitra defeated his Congress rival, Ashok Sen by 85,953 votes to 51,880 votes. Dr. Roy on hearing this news in Delhi rushed to Calcutta and took one of his characteristic prompt decisions, such as he took several times in his life. He had no qualms about straightway abandoning the proposal with which he had been both intellectually and emotionally attached and pay heed to *vox populi*. He issued a long press note through the Director of Publicity, West Bengal where he owned up the entire responsibility for the merger proposal and announced that he was abandoning it in response to public feelings in West Bengal. His concluding remarks were the following :

The result of the election that was announced yesterday keeps me thinking as to whether I should pursue this particular proposal. Although one election like this may not be a clear indication of the will of the people on any such matter, yet we cannot ignore this verdict. I am still as great a believer as ever in the objectives which lie behind our resolution which was published on the 24th of January. I still believe that the problem of West Bengal will not be solved merely by getting a small area added to it. But even so, I have to bow to the opinion of the people as expressed in the last Parliamentary by-election, and, so far as I am concerned, I feel that I should withdraw this proposal and bow down to the bar of public opinion. Let us hope the people of Bengal will come to a right decision for ensuring closer contact with our neighbours. I am informing the Centre about this matter.⁹³

93. Ibid p. 317

He also sent on the same day i.e. 4 May a D.O. letter to Shri Babu, Chief Minister of Bihar⁹⁴ which was as follows:

I am enclosing a statement which I issued to the Press yesterday. This statement is based upon the bare fact that in the North Calcutta parliamentary by-election Congress was defeated. The issue which was made prominent by the opposite party was the question of union of West Bengal and Bihar. As you will see, I have accepted the verdict and withdrawn my proposal for the union of West Bengal and Bihar.

I have written to Shri Govind Ballabh Pant also.⁹⁵

He also kept Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Home Minister Govind Ballabh Pant informed about this decision.

It is true that while his sudden decision for withdrawal of the proposed merger between West Bengal and Bihar in response to rising public opinion in West Bengal was welcomed by the people of West Bengal, in general it did not find favour in Bihar where several leaders openly expressed a feeling of being let down. The last Act in this drama was the passing of the Bihar-West Bengal (transfer of territory) Bill, passed by Parliament transferring the Purulia Subdivision of Manbhum district, except Chas thana and Chandil thana of Purulia to West Bengal. Dr. Roy's greatness was seen in the fact that he did not press for the inclusion of Ches and Chandil on which Jamshedpur's water supply depended. But his scrutinizing eyes noticed that a small stretch was still left out through oversight between the Northern districts and the main West Bengal. He therefore pressed for providing this missing link of about 70 sq. miles of land, which now provided the much-needed line of communication between the northern and the southern parts of West Bengal.

Dr. Roy tried to follow the tradition of the British times when the Governor and the Council of Ministers and Heads of Departments with skeleton staff visited Darjeeling twice a year, once during the summer and once during the Durga Puja season. This gave the Hills

94. Ibid p. 318

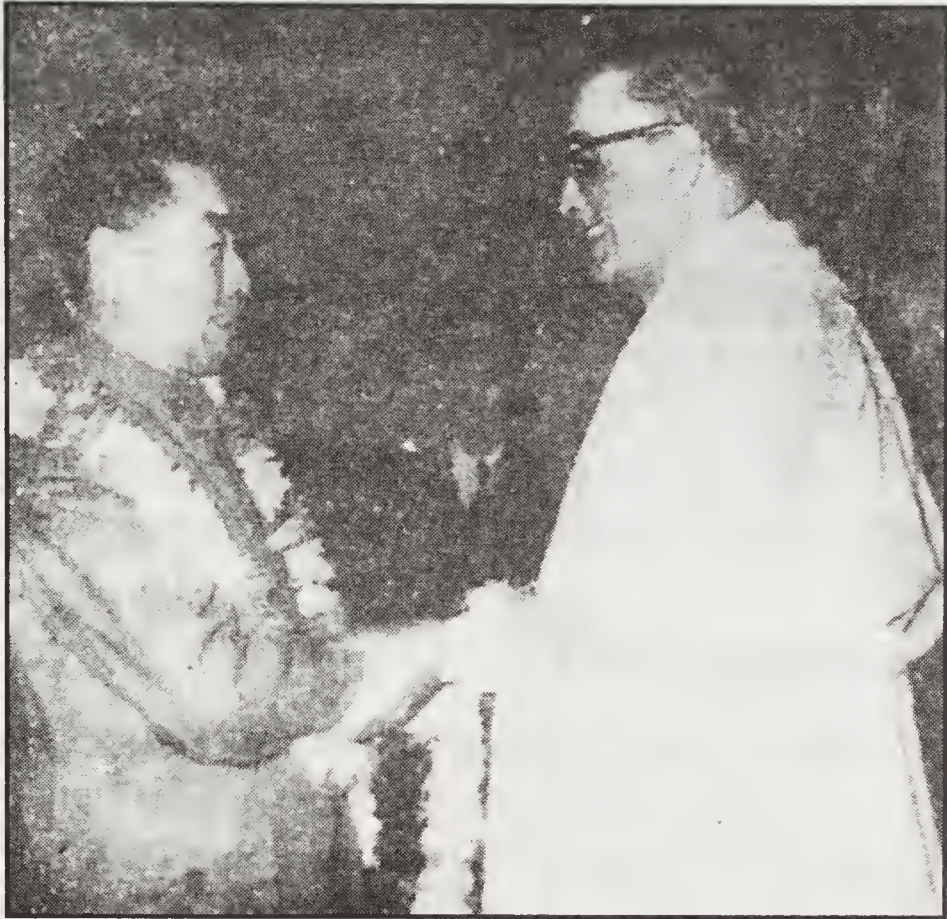
95. Ibid p. 319

people a sense of importance which they valued. He visited Darjeeling at least twice a year for short stays to keep himself abreast with hill area developments. Also, he created specific institutions like the HMS and the Himalayan Zoo for Darjeeling and fought for the Darjeeling Himalayan Railways. That he succeeded in his objective is clear from the fact that during his rule, apart from the issue of Nepali, there was no separatist movement whatsoever among the hill population of Darjeeling. They were in general contented. It was only about two decades later that separatism lifted its ugly head.

Build Your Own House project

In 1956, during September and October 1956, usual months for flooding, and water-logging of West Bengal, there were severe floods. The area affected in the districts was 10185 sq. miles or roughly one third of the area in the State and the number of people affected were 8,36,000. The houses damaged or destroyed numbered 1,84,000. Dr. Roy, as usual, rose to the occasion in his capacity for crisis management and set up machinery with both official and non-official agencies which took care of the affected people both in terms of relief and rehabilitation. He had approved a plan of a model village to be rebuilt by villagers themselves in the flooded villages for two lakh families. This was called “Build Your Own House” scheme where the people themselves were helped by materials from the government and the expertise provided to build their own houses according to certain plans. This innovative scheme based on self-help proved a great success in the flood ravaged districts and was praised by Central Minister, T.T. Krishnamachari.

This period was also marked by the visit of a number of international dignitaries like Prime Minister Bulganin of USSR, Nikita Khrushchev, the supreme leader of the Soviet Union, Emperor Haile Selasie of Ethiopia, Prime Minister Chou en Lai of China, Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia, President Nasser of Egypt, Prime Minister U. Nu. of Myanmar. Those days, Calcutta was one of the major international centres to be visited by all foreign dignitaries. Dr. Roy took special interest in organizing the itineraries of the dignitaries and himself participated in many of the programmes. His great international stature helped in this task and the dignitaries related to him very well as one of the top leaders of India.



Chinese Premier Zhu-En-Lai and Dr. B.C. Roy

Pather Panchali

We may also mention in passing one great achievement of Dr. Roy, namely, the encouragement of Satyajit Ray's immortal film, *Pather Panchali*. Some time in 1954-55, Satyajit Ray had left a lucrative job in an advertisement firm to try on filming Bibhuti Bhushan Bandhopadhyaya's immortal classic *Pather Panchali* (Saga of the Road). He had run out of funds in making this film and the other financiers, very very business-minded, had deserted him midway on being disappointed in their assessment of the commercial success of the film that was essentially set on the scene of the 19th century dismal rural Bengal. Dr. Roy was impressed with the sincerity of the young film maker and overlooking objections from his Director of Publicity and other officials, agreed to acquire the unfinished film for the Government. The film was released in early 1957 and straightaway became a commercial hit both nationally and internationally. On 27 January when he presented the Government silver medal to the Director of the film at Poet Tagore's ancestral house he was jubilant. His pride further increased when *Pather Panchali* received President's Gold medal and received international acclaim in Cannes Film Festival. This was the first time that an Indian film had been so honoured by an

international jury. This did the entire Indian nation proud. *Pather Panchali* went on to become one of the most moving films in the history of the cinema and still earns a sizeable royalty for the State Government after half a century.

Another significant event was his invitation to famous dancer, Uday Shankar, along with his wife Amla Shankar, son Ananda and members of his troupe to move to Calcutta and set up his dance academy there after his old academy at Almora had been destroyed by fire. He extended his helping hand to this great master several times later on.

General Elections 1957

Meanwhile, another quinquennial election was due in 1957 and preparations were afoot. Interestingly, with general progress of West Bengal the opposition parties had also become stronger. The State Congress under the leadership of Atulya Ghosh had now a well-knit organization and announced the names of 230 candidates for the 238 member Assembly as approved by AICC meeting held at Calcutta on 8 February.

In the elections, the Congressmen faced the united force of the Communist Party, Dr. P.C. Ghosh's Praja Socialist Party and nearly all other opposition parties. One of Dr. Roy's new acquisitions was Siddhartha Shankar Ray, grand son of Deshbandhu C.R. Das, whom he persuaded to join politics as a Congress candidate. The elections for 251 Assembly seats and 36 Lok Sabha seats started on March 1. The Congress campaign was as usual opened by Prime Minister Nehru in a mammoth meeting at Calcutta's Brigade Parade Grounds. Dr. Roy, accompanied by the Pradesh Congress Chief, Atulya Ghosh, covered the entire state in a marathon election campaign. But he ignored his own home ground, Bowbazar, which had a cosmopolitan character including Englishmen, French, Chinese, Afghans and many voters of foreign origin. Of 63229 voters, about 29000 were Muslims mostly Urdu-speaking among whom a vicious propaganda had been launched that the Communist Party candidate, Mohammed Ismail, would become West Bengal's Chief Minister if he was returned and that he would take Calcutta city to Pakistan.⁹⁶ Dr. Roy, while busy all over

96. Chakraborty, S. My Years with Dr. B.C. Roy, p. 234.

the state, had ignored his own constituency where, unknown to him, the ground under him had been slipping off due to this vicious propaganda. In the last few days he tried to undo it by undertaking massive padayatra in Bowbazar constituency and partially succeeded in turning the tide. But he defeated Mohammed Ismail by only a small majority of 540. This was a shock to the Congress, although the party was returned to power in West Bengal by capturing 152 seats in a house of 252, thus having a majority of 54 as against 60 in the 1952 elections. P.C. Sen, the State Food Minister and No. 2 to Dr. Roy in the Cabinet, won this time by a majority of 32,852 votes. Dr. Roy's election was hailed by the entire nation including Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. On 26 April 1957 the new West Bengal Ministry headed by Dr. Roy consisting of 13 members was sworn in at Darjeeling by Padmaja Naidu, the Governor of West Bengal, who had taken over on 8 November 1956 after Dr. H.C. Mukherjee's death.

The issues which engaged his immediate attention after the 1957 elections were slum clearance in the city of Calcutta and the Model Village Reconstruction Scheme through self-help by the villagers themselves, which had been interrupted by the elections. He continued as Finance Minister and presented the 1957-58 budget. In his speech, he took the Centre to task for ignoring West Bengal's special needs and her just claims. He also criticized the Constitution's pattern of division of taxing powers between the Centre and the States, in particular, the monopoly of taxing industrial wealth being given to the Centre while leaving with the State Government only power to tax agriculture which was as good as non-existent. His 78th birthday on 1 July which had almost acquired the characteristics of a national event was attended by several national leaders including Central Irrigation Minister, S.K. Patil and Labour Minister Gulzari Lal Nanda. They paid rich tributes to the illustrious man in the following words:⁹⁷

Dr. Roy has very few equals in India, as a political leader and physician and statesman. His name would go down in history as one of the architects of great nation.⁹⁸

97. Ibid p. 241.

98. Ibid p. 241.

All the cash presents he received were donated to charity. As usual, the food problem, chronic, during these years engaged his constant attention, although he received able assistance from Food Minister, P.C. Sen. To solve the problem of feeding Calcutta city with its huge purchasing power and retaining the foodgrains in the districts he introduced a scheme for 'modified rationing' in greater Calcutta in September 1958. Union Food Minister, A.P. Jain was present and promised regular supply of foodgrains (both rice and wheat) from the central stock. This took the wind from the sail of the opposition, which did try to mount an agitation, but with little success. Although the opposition leaders courted arrest, the Chief Minister even refused to meet a deputation from the Famine Resistance and Anti-Price Increase Committee consisting of 11 Left parties. Also it was his mediation which led to satisfactory solution of all India Bank strike (October 1958) called by the Communist trade unions. With the confidence he commanded from both striking employees and the employers and with his innate humanism he gave a formula that was accepted both by the Indian Banking Association and the Unions.

A challenge from within

In mid-1958, Bidhan faced one of the biggest personal crises he had faced in the whole of his life from unexpected quarters. We have already mentioned how he persuaded Siddhartha Shankar Ray, the grandson of Chittaranjan Das, to join politics and seek election from the Bhawanipur constituency in 1956 election. On 9 March, the Chief Minister, almost like a bolt from the blue, received a one page resignation letter from Siddhartha Shankar. Dr. Roy was shocked beyond measures and even went out of his way to visit Ray in his residence to persuade him to retrace his steps but Sidhartha was unrelenting. On 24 March, Siddharth made a long statement in the Assembly which took three and half-hours to finish where he targeted Food Minister Prafulla Chandra Sen and Home (Police) and Transport Minister Shri Kalipada Mukherjee for being corrupt. Naturally, this was God sent opportunity for the opposition, which rose up strongly in support of Siddharth Shankar Ray. On March 27, they moved a no- confidence motion against the Government. Dr. Roy, now 75, rose at 9.10 pm and spoke extempore in a cool and dignified manner refuting each one of the charges made by Siddhartha and the opposition. He said,

“I have no quarrel with Siddhartha Shankar Ray if he felt like resigning. There is no doubt also that I am speaking practically on behalf of the Government because according to the members opposite me am I not villain of the piece? I take full responsibility for the Minister against whom they are complaining. These are the two Ministers who have to deal with the subject of which every individual in society has to deal. The gentlemen who take the burden of carrying this enormous load on their head is bound to be singled out for criticism.” He gave facts and figures to dispel the opposition charges of corruption and ridiculed the so-called classless society in Soviet Union to have a dig at the Communist party. The Congress members stood solidly behind their leader. At 11.15 pm the no-confidence motion was thrown out. Incidentally, S.S.Ray contested as a left- supported independent candidate in the by-election from Bhawanipur constituency and defeated his Congress rival Bijoy Kumar Banerjee by over 10,000 votes. This was viewed by Nehru and several Congress leaders as the waning of the Congress influence. But Dr. Roy was undeterred.

Leftist Food Movement

Both in 1958 and 1959, he had to face the usual challenge of refugee demonstrations and agitations by the leftists, in the months of June and July. These annual agitations had a standard pattern. The left-sponsored Anti-Price Rise and Famine Resistance Committtee would give a call for a movement. There would be public meetings at a number of places and demonstrators would proceed in processions towards the prohibited zone around the Raj Bhawan and the Writers' Building. As they were to cross the prohibited area under section 144 Cr.PC, police would oppose them. They would try to break the police cordon. This would lead to throwing of brickbats by demonstrators. *Lathi* charge or the use of tear gas by the police would be resorted to. This would be the signal for the outbreak of violence all over the city in course of which buses and trams would be burnt up. Thereafter, the military would be called and things would become quiet after a few days. Usually, the Government would come out with some kind of face-saving formula and the demonstrators would accept them. All such movements would quieten down as Bengal's universal , the Durgapuja would draw nearer. The public always felt that the food

problem and refugee problems were serious, but the good doctor was sincerely trying his best to solve these problems.

The 1959 food movement was the last great leftist challenge, Dr. Roy faced. As in the previous years during the season of foodgrain scarcity around July, the left-sponsored Anti-Price Rise and Famine Resistance Committee launched a systematic campaign of law-breaking, defiance and violence. Schools and colleges had just opened after the summer vacation. In the Assembly, there was the ritual of no-confidence motion and anti-government speeches. Outside, processions came to approach the Dalhousie's square and the Writers' Building to present a memorandum to the government. As the police obstructed them while entering in the Sec.144 forbidden area the processionists tried to break police cordon. The police resorted to lathi charge, arrests and tear-gassing in succession and thereafter firing if all the other efforts failed. This was the signal for general anti-governmental rioting all over the city. Curfew was clamped and stayed in force until things returned to normal. But in 1959 the agitation was on a vastly enlarged scale. The main target of the opposition was Food Minister, Prafulla Chandra Sen, rather than the Chief Minister. So difficult was the food situation particularly in West Bengal. He was replaced by S.K.Patil. The opposition seized upon this opportunity to press for P.C.Sen's resignation on this issue and mounted an agitation. On 31 August and 1 September, there were pitched battles between the police and the crowd at a number of places in the city, and gradually, the initiatives passed into the hands of anti-social elements who attacked five *thanas*. Even the Chief Minister's house was attacked. Troops had to be called on 2 September. There was firing on that day. The five-day disturbance in Calcutta took a toll of 31 lives and 3000 got injured besides heavy damage to property. Even Prime Minister Nehru suggested a change in Food Minister's position in West Bengal. Dr. Roy refused to budge an inch and to let down his faithful lieutenant, Prafulla Sen. He bluntly told the opposition on 8 September that it was for the Chief Minister to choose his Ministers and that he would keep Sen as long as he felt it necessary. Shortly after this, the disturbances were drowned by the great cyclone of September 1959 and the standard pattern of leftist food agitation mysteriously disappeared. Also, with the dramatic improvement in economic situation

the students, the refugees and the industrial workers could no longer be enthused into participating in those agitations, which had become empty rituals.

Dispute with China on the Northern Border and the growing unpopularity of the Communist Party

Meanwhile the aggressive activities of the Chinese on India's northern border were casting a shadow on Indian politics. From the time Communist China had militarily occupied Tibet in 1950, border disputes along a largely undemarcated Tibet-India border had surfaced. The Chinese questioned the legality of the McMahon line along the border between NEFA and Tibet in the east, and the traditional border between Ladakh and Tibet in the west, and in the middle sector between UP and Tibet. But while the differences had been swept under the carpet with the somewhat irrational pro-Chinese attitude of Nehru and his Defence Minister, Krishna Menon, and the hype over the Panchsheel in the late fifties, the Chinese started adopting a confrontationist posture all along the mountainous border. They occupied vast tracts in Ladakh, constructed a road between Tibet and Sinkiang largely on territory that India claimed and set up armed posts in Indian territory. They started harassing Indian pilgrims to Lake Mansarovar and Mount Kailash on the ground that they did not have passports and visas essential for travelling in foreign countries. Several attempts at negotiation even at the level of two Prime Ministers failed. There was a stringent anti-India propaganda in the Chinese radio and the press criticizing India's granting of political asylum to Tibet's fugitive God-king, Dalai Lama, and his followers and India allowing the town of Kalimpong in West Bengal for anti-Chinese espionage.

A flash point reached when, on 21 October 1959, the Chinese attacked an India post in Ladakh area and killed seventeen paramilitary policemen doing guard duties. This led to an outcry in the whole of India and the Communist Party of India stood totally isolated, both in the Parliament and in the West Bengal Assembly, on account of their ambivalence on the border issue. The West Bengal Assembly passed a resolution protesting emphatically against the aggressive activities of China and the anti-national policy of some political parties, in particular, the Communist Party of India. Speaking in the House, as leader of

the House, Dr. Bidhan Roy emphatically asserted "Any one supporting Chinese policy was unpatriotic. It was amusing that the Party which had a footing in India and whose members were born in India should run to Chou-en-lai to be told how it should behave." Concluding, the Chief Minister in a louder voice, uttered the following words of caution, "This country will not tolerate a Party which, while having a footing in this country do not have a flag belonging to this country but one that had been borrowed from another. India's main weapon was unity and whoever went against this unity was a 'traitor.'

Even Siddhartha Ray, an ally of the Communist Party of India since 1958, opposed both China and the Communist Party of India and declared the Chinese stand as "historically incorrect, politically unsound, legally untenable and morally wrong". He also demanded that Kalimpong in Darjeeling district should no longer be allowed to be used for espionage. The Communist Party of India and in particular the pro-China leaders of the party, faced public wrath everywhere. There were attacks on Community Party meetings and processions. Communist leaders were put in an embarrassing position by their Chinese comrades who, according to some of them, had stabbed them in the back. There was a developing polarization in that party between the pro-China elements who believed that India rather than China was the aggressor, and those who were critical of China's provocative and high handed activities on the border issue. This led eventually, after China's open attack on India in October-November 1962, to a split in the CPI. Dr. Bidhan Roy, like Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, was a hard-liner. In a letter to Prime Minister Nehru on 30 November 1959, he very strongly advocated a ban on the Communist Party on account of their disloyalty to the nation and a clear unwillingness of a section of the Communist Party to take any anti-Chinese stand on the border issue. However, he conceded to Jyoti Basu's request to allow them to hold public meetings and to use microphones to explain their views.⁹⁹ But Nehru, as usual, was unyielding on this issue. In a letter to Bidhan Roy on 2 December 1959, he wrote, "We are naturally following carefully the activities of Communist Party, more especially in regard to our border troubles. It is clear that their attitude has acted very much against them in the

99. S. Chakraborty-with Dr. B.C. Roy and other Chief Ministers- p. 435.

public mind. They have difficult choice to face and it is because of this that they are greatly troubled and even internally they are pulling in different directions. On the one hand, they can stick to their so-called internationalist policy and support, directly or indirectly, China, or they have to come out more openly in condemnation of Chinese aggression.

If they follow the former course, they condemn themselves in the eyes of the Indian public. If they follow the second course then to some extent they undermine themselves from the communist point of view. Even that is not likely to do them much good.

I think it would be very unwise for us at this stage to ban the Communist Party. That in effect will get them out of this dilemma and they will gain a measure of public sympathy. Also the international consequences of this will be harmful to India. But there is no reason why individuals breaking the law by speech or otherwise should not be proceeded against. We might be stricter about processions also.¹⁰⁰

But Bidhan Roy, as Chief Minister of West Bengal in 1960, did not have the powers that he had as Prime Minister of West Bengal before 1950. Nonetheless, the border trouble from 1959 onwards demoralized the main Opposition Party in West Bengal and enormously strengthened his political position in the State, as he was stepping into the last phase of his life, the zenith of his career.

100. S. Chakraborty-with Dr. B.C. Roy and other Chief Ministers, page 436-37.

The Intrepid Institution Builder

No Indian statesman in the twentieth century has to his credit the building and nurturing of as many institutions as Dr. B.C. Roy, and in so many diverse fields. Early in his working life he developed the propensity to conceive of new Institutions wherever he perceived a need for improvement of people's condition or providing focus on a neglected area. The fascinating story started as early as 1917, when a young man who was suffering from chronic pleurisy and was his long-time patient, wanted to know what he should do to his property. Dr. Roy's advice was that "he should leave it for the establishment of an institution for the treatment of the disease for which he was suffering". At that time, there was no special bed or hospital for tuberculosis patients. All such cases were treated in the general wards with other patients. The young man accepted this idea, constituted a trust with Dr. Roy, Sir P.C. Roy and Shri B.K. Ghosh as trustees and willed his entire property of the value of over Rs. 2 lakhs for starting a T.B. hospital within five years of his death.¹⁰¹ The result was the Jadavpur T.B. Hospital, the first of its kind in Bengal, which Dr. Roy nurtured for many years.

People responded generously to his appeals for funds, including one particular donor who agreed to take over all Bidhan's financial responsibility for the day-to-day running of the hospital. Dr. Roy was fortunate to have the support of Dr. Kumud Sankar Roy who took over the charge of attending to patients, daily and shouldering the administrative responsibility.

The second great institution to his credit was the Chittaranjan Seva Sadan started in Deshbandhu Chittaranjan's house which he had bequeathed to the nation. He had already selected Dr. Roy as a trustee

101. For details see Thomas K.P. op cit page 259.

to his endowment. After his death Gandhiji requested Bidhan to undertake the task of turning Deshbandhu's home into a home for suffering humanity. The Chittaranjan Seva Sadan was inaugurated by Motilal Nehru on 14 April, 1926. A sum of Rs. 8 lakhs was collected and handed over to Bidhan as Secretary of the Deshbandhu Memorial Trust. Dr. Roy's self-respect and sense of national pride prevented him from appealing to the alien Government for any assistance. He therefore went on collecting public donations to finance each new unit or wing added to the hospital in later years e.g. Shishu Sadan, Hydro-Radiological Institute, the Cancer Hospital.¹⁰² "Dr. Roy knows every brick of this institution and every brick knows that but for Dr. Roy it may not have been possible for it to be added to the structure to make this magnificent hospital or home of service for the suffering humanity".¹⁰³ It was only after independence that Government assistance was forthcoming. Prime Minister Nehru inaugurated the Radioactive Isotopes Laboratory in the Chittaranjan Cancer Hospital.

A third institution he built up, was the Victoria Institution of Calcutta, later on renamed as Victoria College. It grew out of a property called Lily Cottage belonging to Sunity Debi, the Dowager Maharani of Kuch Behar, who had made a trust of this property with Sir Rajendra Nath Mukherjee, T.C. Goswami, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, Nirmal Chander and Dr. Roy as trustees to carry on the Victoria School started by her father, Keshav Chandra Sen. Dr. Roy had to arrange a loan from an insurance company at 6% rate of interest to help clearing the accumulated debts and also had to collect other donations. Eventually, the present day Victoria Institution came up. Some of the other institutions which he helped starting and developing were the Kamla Nehru Hospital at Allahabad, the Jadavpur Engineering College, the Jadavpur University, the IIT Kharagpur, The Indian School of Social Welfare and Business Management (ISWBM), the Indian Institute of Management (Calcutta), the Nirmal Hriday Home of Mother Teresa and many other such homes and hospitals like Kanchrapara T.B. Hospital. In setting up the ISWBM he foresaw the need for business management education long

102. For details see Thomas K.P. op cit page 259-261.

103. Thomas K.P. Ibid page 264.

before it became known in India. The IIT Kharagpur (with German collaboration) and the IIM Calcutta (with collaboration from Massachusetts Institute of Technology of U.S.A.), were world standard state-of-the art institutions in their respective fields.

We have already mentioned how, in response to specific economic needs or difficult situations, Dr. Roy promoted industrial organizations like the Shillong Hydro Electricity Corporation and the Air Ways India. He also promoted a number of private sector companies in the field of chemicals, pharmaceuticals and engineering. After he became Chief Minister of West Bengal and had an opportunity to influence decision-making at the macro level, he was instrumental in promoting a large number of public sector corporations like Chittaranjan Locomotive Works, Durgapur Steels, Durgapur Projects, Durgapur Chemicals, Myurakshi Valley Project, Bandal Power Station, Horinghata Dairy and Poultry Project, Haldia Port, Farakka Barrage. For preparing a Master Plan for the development of Greater Calcutta, he had the CMPO set up with the assistance of the Ford Foundation. From CMPO came the logical next step, like the CMDA for implementation of the Plan. The existing agencies, like the Calcutta Municipal Corporation or the Calcutta Improvement Trust, in his reckoning were too overloaded with their duties to effectively handle the responsibility of executing the comprehensive development plan for Metropolitan Calcutta and a new institution viz. CMDA was created. On the cultural side, he created West Bengal Academy of Dance and Drama, the National Theatre (Rabindra Sadan) and helped in promoting other organizations like Uday Shankar Academy and pioneering ventures like Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali*. On the education side, he was responsible for several new Universities like Bardwan, Kalyani Rabindra Bharati and North Bengal. In order to cater to the entertainment of rural folk, he created a Folk entertainment section in the Department of Publicity.

He was one of the founders of the Indian Medical Association and shouldered nearly all its administrative responsibilities as long as he was alive. His role in the formative years of the R.G. Kar Medical College (earlier Carmichael Medical College) had already been emphasized. He was also instrumental in setting up the Aghore

Kamaini Maternity Centre and Health Centre of Digha. He was also involved with the Indian Red Cross for many years and was the founder Chairman of Indian Society of Physicians and continued as such for many years.

We have also mentioned his pioneering role in setting up of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute at Darjeeling to commemorate the conquest of Mount Everest. Tenzing Norgay became the Chief Instructor. In industry, he promoted several enterprises as already stated, like Shillong Hydro-electric Company and Airways India.

There was also an interlude of Bidhan's successful foray into journalism. He was thrust in the role of a journalist by C.R. Das when he was asked by the Deshbandhu to look after the two journals, *Forward* and *Liberty*. He ran these two papers with dignity and assumed administrative, financial and editorial responsibility. As already stated, he pioneered the United Press of India and became its first Chairman, a job he handled with considerable finesse and sincerity.

Thus, it would be correct to describe Dr. Bidhan Roy as one of the most prolific institution builders in the recent history of our country. His creativity was active even till his death. Shortly before it, he changed his Will to exclude his own house at 36 Wellington Street in which he had left all his property to his nephew, Justice Subimal Roy, and bequeathed it for a polio clinic and hospital for children to be run by a Trust that included apart from relations like Subimal Roy and eminent people like B.M. Birla (Chairman). Thus by a coincidence, the last of the institutions that he promoted was also a hospital as was the very first one he had created viz. the Jadavpur T.B. Hospital. Unfortunately this institution did not have the benefit of being nurtured by its great founder. It received neither effective government support, nor much public charity and maintains a precarious existence today.

The Zenith Years

As the decade of the fifties was nearing its end, Dr. B.C. Roy had succeeded in not only overcoming all the political challenges in West Bengal, but also putting West Bengal's economy back on the rails, and once again making her India's number one State, in terms of industry and investment. Nationally, he was the elder statesman to whom Nehru and other central leaders turned for advice whenever they needed it. He encouraged the private sector investment as best as he could with the result that Indian business houses made a beeline for locating new projects in West Bengal. Her locational advantages were compounded by an investment friendly Chief Minister. Also, multinationals made West Bengal their most favoured investment destination in India, a position West Bengal started losing fast after Dr. Roy was no more. He also took many initiatives in persuading the Central Government Ministries to select sites for their projects in West Bengal where Dr. Roy's administration readily provided all facilities. The Chief Minister's strong motivation automatically passed down the bureaucratic levels. Indeed, West Bengal's officialdom was highly investment-friendly. That Bidhan was refreshingly free from the public sector-private sector bug that bedevilled India's industrial growth in the decades following him helped matters considerably. For him, an industrial project was in itself much more consequential than its source of ownership. Under this industry-friendly government environment both the greater Calcutta industrial region and the Asansol-Dhanbad-Durgapur industrial belt progressed by leaps and bounds. Small and ancillary industries also flourished in several zones creating thousands of new jobs. Unemployment for all practical purposes, became inconsequential by the beginning of sixties.

The life of Bidhan Chandra Roy, a true Karmayogi, was the history of West Bengal for fourteen years, when Bidhan had taken over on 23 January 1948, a whole range of circumstances - the war, the

famine, the unprecedented communal violence of 1946-47, the partition and the truncated nature of the new province and its vastly reduced land surface, the serious dislocation in the communication network, the seriously bruised jute industry on which the State's economy largely relied with the jute growing areas falling on the other side of the border and the massive and ever growing refugee problem and the great responsibility of providing them relief and rehabilitation benefits - had reduced West Bengal to the position of India's number one problem state. The pressure of vastly overgrown population on the limited land surface was enormous. Feeding this enormous overgrown population in a food grains deficit province further hit by the separation of most of the real paddy growing districts as a result of the partition was a difficult task. Land had to be found for growing jute to feed the 100 and odd jute mills in the Calcutta region. Unemployment was at the highest level. Communist insurgency was rampant.

All this had miraculously disappeared by 1961-62. People had food and housing. Refugees had been largely settled by Government as well as their own efforts. A string of productive schemes such as Damodar Valley Corporation, Durgapur Steel, Kalyani Salt Lake City, Bandel Thermal Plant and Haringhata had fructified. Both industrial production and agriculture output had increased enormously. The jute industry had been rehabilitated. West Bengal's infrastructure had significantly improved. West Bengal was the number one destination in the country for investment in both private sector and public sector. Calcutta had become one of the major international cities in the world with a large population of foreigners.

The architect of this economic miracle was Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy who had brought his enormous specialization as a physician and surgeon to the task of crisis management and socio-economic rejuvenation on a gigantic scale, and achieved grand success. By the time he was to end his life's inning his dream of achieving "a prosperous Bengal in a prosperous India" had been nearly achieved.

The outstanding events in this last but most glorious phase of his life were the visit of the Prime Minister Khrushchev and Soviet President, Brezhnev, the visit of Queen Elizabeth of United Kingdom, the formation of the CMPO and CMDA, the launching of the Third Five Year Plan, the creation of four new Universities, the beginning of the work on the Farakka Project to meet the threats to Calcutta Port, the launching of the Dandakaranya Project covering Orissa and Madhya

Pradesh for settling the refugees from East Pakistan, the large scale anti-Bengalee rioting in Assam (1960) and the counter-agitation in West Bengal, the Central Government employees' strike (July 1960), the great controversy over transfer of Berubari Union in Jalpaiguri district to Pakistan which was not only opposed by public opinion in West Bengal but for a time cooled the relations between the Centre and



During the visit of Krushchev and Bulganin

West Bengal, the Third Finance Commission, Durgapur Session of the All India Congress Committee (May 1961), the celebration of Rabindranath Tagore's birth centenary, the recurrence of communal violence in Malda and Dinajpur, his last travel to Europe and America combining eye treatment with business for the nation, the setting up of the Durgapur Chemicals, the worsening of Indo-Chinese relations over the disputed northern border, the third general elections and the resounding success of the Congress just before the fatal heart attack that took him away from the mortal world.

Dr. Roy's Second Eye Operation

Dr. Roy, with his declining eye sight and needing yet another surgery, selected Darjeeling for his second eye operation in December 1959 - January 1960. Dr. Lindney, his eye surgeon had done the first in Vienna. As he could not come he sent his able colleague,

D. Bocek, to perform the operation. The day the bandage was to be taken off Dr. Bocek asked Dr. Roy “what would you like to see first when the bandage is removed and you open your eyes?” Dr. Roy’s reply was, as could be expected from someone with a keen appreciation of beauty, “Kanchenjanga, of course if she be pleased to make herself available, otherwise why will I come here? Indeed Roy’s delight at the blooming of the first tulip in West Bengal Assembly nursery was comparable to his delight at the first discharge of coke from Durgapur coke oven, or the beginning of the flow of silt from the Hooghly bed to reclaim salt lakes or the first flow of irrigation water from Tilpara barrage.¹⁰⁴ He continued to take keen personal interest in the rejuvenation and continued growth of the city of Calcutta, India’s largest metropolis.

On November 7, 1960 the Chief Minister held a top level conference with Dr. Douglas Ensminger, Director, Ford Foundation in India, who assured Ford Foundation assistance in the task of solving the chronic ills of the great metropolis of Calcutta and planning for its future. This discussion resulted in the Ford Foundation assisting in developing the Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organisation. This envisaged a master Plan for the whole of Calcutta stretching from Diamond Harbour to Uttarpara and included projects for slum clearance, road-building, sewage-disposal, beautification, regional planning, health services and other amenities. A West Bengal Reconstruction Corporation was also incorporated as a company with R.K. Mitra, ICS, as its Chairman, with the charter to set up four satellite towns near Calcutta including the one along Diamond Harbour Road. Blueprints were made, and some land acquisition notices were also issued. Unfortunately, the visionary was destined to be no more in about two years, and after him none gave much importance to this path-breaking scheme.

From Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organisation (CMPO) to Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA) that was to implement CMPO’s schemes was the next logical step and Dr. Roy spent considerable time on it.

A highlight of 1960 was a visit of the Soviet President Voroshilov (January 1960) accompanied by Vice-Chairman Koslov. This was to be followed shortly thereafter by the memorable visit of Soviet Prime Minister, Nikita Khrushchev (March 1960). Prime Minister U Nu of Burma also visited Calcutta the same time and Nehru flew by special

plane to hold a Mini-Summit Conference at Raj Bhawan, Calcutta. Needless to state that Dr. Roy was the master of all ceremonies and also the guiding spirit from behind. He ridiculed the Communists by often repeating Krushchev's statement "We are confident that the Indian people will overcome their difficulties. Let the dog bark while the Indian elephant will march forward along the way selected by him." Shortly thereafter, Dr. Roy presented West Bengal's Rs. 480 crore draft of the Third Five Year Plan and also addressed the National Development Council in Delhi. Immediately after Prime Minister had spoken he said "The Third Five Year Plan should be considered as springboard to the economic development in future plans". It was while presenting the Third Five Year Plan in West Bengal Assembly in April 1960 that he announced his goal in a picturesque sentence that he wished to create a "Prosperous Bengal in a prosperous India." And asked the people to rededicate themselves to the task of building such a Bengal. He enumerated the following seven schemes which had secured sanction from the Planning Commission :

(1) Salt Lake Reclamation Scheme (Rs. 19 crores); (2) Jaldhaka Hydro-electric Scheme (Rs. 4.5 Crores); (3) Bandel Thermal Power Station with a capacity of 750 M.W. (4) Durgapur Thermal Power Station; (5) Durgapur Fertilizer Project (Rs. 20 crores); (6) Tar Distillation Plant at Durgapur; and (7) Calcutta-Durgapur Gas Grid Project. Total expenditure in all these schemes amounted to Rs. 83 crores including Rs. 32 crores in foreign exchange (all these projects were in the process of implementation except the Durgapur Fertilizer Project which was taken up and implemented by the Centre). On March 4 the Chief Minister had met a three-man International Economic Mission of the World Bank and pleaded for a loan of Rs. 32 crores to be repaid in rupee payment, if necessary.

He was forever concerned with saving Calcutta port from gradual death on account of silting and emphasized on the imperative need to put into effect the Ganga Barrage Scheme. His correspondence on this subject with Prime Minister Nehru shows his utmost sincerity and grim determination to give effect to this project.¹⁰⁵

A unique quality that marked Bidhan all along was a passion for doing things that promoted economic development. This passion

105. NMML, New Delhi. Dr B.C. Roy Papers.

manifested earlier in establishing companies like Shillong Hydro-electricity Co. or Airways India which fulfilled important gaps in the economy, had broadened in the last fifteen years of his life into a vision for West Bengal and India. From this vision came a sense of mission and a strong determination to rebuild the economy of war-damaged, famine-hit and partition-ravaged West Bengal and turn her into the foremost developed State in India. He devoted his hundred percent attention and working capacity towards this end, and left no stone unturned. And succeed he did in accomplishing his mission as few in Bengal history have done.

His plan of action had included developing the greater Calcutta industrial zone and the Asansol-Durgapur-Dhanbad region into two of the strongest industrial bases for the country, developing a series of multi-purpose river valley projects like the Damodar Valley Corporation and Mayurakshi Valley Scheme, setting up a number of key, strategic industrial units like Chittaranjan Locomotive and Durgapur Steel, developing the City of Calcutta through organizations like the CMPO and later on CMDA as also developing a string of satellite towns like Kalyani and Salt Lake City, adding to West Bengal's power capacity by setting up new mega thermal power stations like Bandel and Santaldihi, settling the refugees from East Bengal in economically viable agricultural and small scale industry schemes and also in addition settling them in newer territories like Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Orissa and Dandakarnya project in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, working towards a barrage at Farakka at the point where the Hooghly river separates from the Ganga for revival of Calcutta port, constructing a satellite port further downstream at Haldia to enable larger ships to use Calcutta port system, working towards and eventually succeeding in incorporating a slice of Bihar territory so as to provide territorial continuity to the physically separated districts of North Bengal with the rest of West Bengal, forming the Calcutta State Transport Corporation and the North Bengal State Transport Corporation, promoting new University like Burdwan, Kalyani and North Bengal in order to reduce the pressure on overburdened Calcutta University, and decentralize higher education transforming the Jadavpur Engineering College in the Jadavpur University, developing the sea-side resort of Digha into a tourist centre, increasing the tourist potential of Darjeeling district, setting up the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute at Darjeeling with the conqueror of Mount Everest, Tensing Norgay, as its head to encourage

mountaineering and adventure tourism in the country, and finally attracting private sector investment and foreign investment into West Bengal¹⁰⁶ which, under Dr. Roy's leadership, developed as the most favoured investment destination in the country as long as he was alive. He did not carry any ideological baggage on his head and encouraged both the private sector and the public sector to blossom side by side in happy co-existence. Unfortunately, his great vision and single-minded devotion were not shared by those who followed him as Chief Ministers. The legacy he inherited on the assumption of the office of the Chief Minister of West Bengal was unenviable, and he steered the ship of the State in the right direction. The result was beyond belief. West Bengal had made spectacular progress in industry, agriculture as well as infrastructure. Electric traction had been introduced in the railways, and advanced considerably. The first expressway had been completed between Calcutta and Durgapur. There had been visible improvement in education, health services and general living standards of the people.

Assam Disturbance, 1960

Meanwhile violence broke out in Assam in July 1960. This was in a way a fall out of the agitations and counter-agitations during the state's reorganization controversy of the mid-50s. The Bengali speaking people in areas like Cachar and Karimganj and parts of Goalpara district had agitated for separation from Assam on the ground that the Assamese speaking majority had wanted to impose their language on others. The Assamese people had resented the domination of the job market by the Bengalees and started a Bengal Khadao (drive out Bengalees) agitation. This gathered momentum in July 1960. As anti-Bengali riots started all over the Brahmaputra Valley, it started an exodus of Bengali speaking people to the contiguous areas of West Bengal viz. Alipore Dooars and Cooch Behar. Also, the Bengali speaking majority of the Barak Valley started retaliating. The situation was further complicated by the passing of the Official Languages Act in Assam at this time, making Assamese the only language of the State and denying Bengali its due position in the Barak Valley. Unfortunately, the Chief Minister of Assam, B.P. Chaliha, continued to be bed-ridden with illness for a long time and, in his absence, the hawks among the Assamese leaders were calling the shots. The refugee camps in West Bengal were full and

106. Chakraborty S. pages 299-302, My Years with Dr. B.C. Roy.

swelling every day. Dr. B.C. Roy handled the situation with great tact and understanding, counselling the Assamese leadership about how to restore normalcy by containing the hawkish elements and defusing the gravity, and creating conditions where the refugees could go back to



Roy, a tall leader with the strong Home Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri their homes and, at the same time, keeping in check the hawkish elements in Bengal from starting anti-Assamese demonstrations. He championed the cause of the linguistic minorities and took up their causes with both the Centre and the Assam Government and asked for due safeguards. He persuaded the Congress High Command to send Central Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, to visit Assam and strongly supported the formula suggested by Shastri as a solution of the raging problem. The main features of the Shastri formula were:

- (i) Doing away with the provision relating to Mahakuma Parisad from the Assam Language Act. Mahakuma Parisads, subdivision bodies and municipal bodies were given the authority to alter the language of a particular area if these local authorities so desired by a majority of two-third of the members voting in favour of such an amendment.

- (ii) Communication between the state headquarters and Cachar (Bengali majority district) and the autonomous hill districts to continue in English until replaced by Hindi.
- (iii) At the State level English will continue to be used for present; later English will continue to be used along with Assamese; and
- (iv) Linguistic minorities in the State will be accorded safeguard as mentioned in the Government of India's memorandum dated 19 September, 1956.

Dr. Roy endorsed the Shastri formula and commended it for acceptance in Assam. This shows that he not only championed the right of the linguistic minorities, but also had the capacity to rise above the extreme point of view and to accommodate the consideration of the minority. Jyoti Basu, the leader of the opposition, gave support to Dr. Roy.

The Congress President, Dr. Sanjeeva Reddy, and Defence Minister, V.K. Krishna Menon, also visited riot-torn Assam. The Prime Minister flew to Assam on July 17 on a three-day visit. The Lok Sabha also debated on the situation in Assam for 3 days and adopted a resolution moved by Atulya Ghosh, calling for an enquiry by one or more Supreme Court judges into the circumstances leading to the disturbances and suggesting remedial measures for ensuring protection of the rights guaranteed under the Constitution to all citizens and preventing recurrence of such incidents. Dr. Roy's deft handling of the situation received appreciation from all around, including leaders like J.B. Kripalani and Bhupesh Gupta and even the Chief Minister of Assam, B.P. Chaliha, who announced to the press at Dum Dum airport on September 15 "Dr. B.C. Roy, the Chief Minister of Bengal, should be regarded as a national leader. He was equally interested in the development of Assam as he was interested in that of West Bengal". Eventually the Assam Government appointed two official commissions - one for enquiring into the riots in the Brahmaputra Valley and the other for enquiring into firing at Silchar.

By 1961 and 1962 Dr. Roy had reached the climax of his career as a politician, as a physician, and as a man. As summed up by one of his biographers "For Dr. B.C. Roy the years 1961 and 1962 were the most

glorious chapter of his career as Chief Minister of West Bengal. The years were the harbinger of peace, prosperity and progress for West Bengal transcending the bounds of a statesman-physician. He had become a legendary figure. Whenever he moved in his State, thousands of people came to greet him. He drew vast crowds, which Nehru alone could do. On the economic plane, some of his big schemes were looking up and many more gigantic schemes under the Third Plan were in the offing. From construction stage many projects had leaped into productive stage. Sky-kissing chimneys in Durgapur were belching smoke, bringing new hopes to the minds of the people. Rice production had surpassed all records with 5.3 million tonnes. He was nearing 80, but seemed to have conquered age and was capable of producing newer plans, which bewildered experts and economists. Over the China issue, his major opponents, the Communists, were divided and weakened. The forces of nationalism gained supremacy.¹⁰⁷ Even at 80, he was erect like a stately tree and his fast gait would be the envy of people much younger than him. He initiated the blue print for the second bridge across the River Hooghly and the Farakka Barrage, the former to reduce the pressure on the Howrah bridge, and the latter for saving the Calcutta Port and also to provide for a bridge to connect North Bengal with South Bengal.

Both Farakka project and the second Hooghly Bridge fructified after Dr. Roy's death. He was also busy during 1960-62 in a variety of activities such as Jagdish Bose Science Talent Search Committee of which he was the national President inaugurating the new site of the Secretariat Library in Writers' Buildings, attending to ailing Home Minister, G.B. Pant in Delhi and President Rajendra Prasad and switching on the 50000 spindle Kalyani Spinning Mill as the first among four such proposed mills to meet the spinning needs of the weavers of West Bengal. In between he had to deal with yet another outbreak of Hindu-Muslim violence in Malda district and the adjacent Rajshahi district of East Pakistan and the resultant refugee problems, a fresh bout of anti-Bengali agitation in Assam and the repatriation of Assam evacuees from Bengal back to Assam and the demand of the Nepali population of Darjeeling for recognizing Nepali as an official language and assuaging the aggrieved hill population. He journeyed to Darjeeling on April 8 accompanied by Prime Minister Nehru to attend the Himalayan Mountainering Institute (HMI) convocation and also to

107. Chakraborty S. Ibid p. 324.

talk to the leaders of the agitation in the Hills to assure them that steps would be taken to declare Nepali as an official language for the Hill areas of Darjeeling district.

On January 26 1961, the Republic Day, President Radhakrishnan conferred on Bidhan Chandra Roy the Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award of the nation, a fitting recognition of a life time of activities in the service of the nation. When he received the news beaming with a smile like a child he was in a meeting with Communist MLAs explaining to them the Greater Calcutta Water and Sewage Scheme with assistance from the World Health Organisation, the Ford Foundation and UN Emergency Fund, and scheme for a new satellite town, south of Calcutta, on both sides of the Diamond Harbour Road. The latter project never took off. He also played a leading role in establishing the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, one among the first two IIMs with technical assistance from the well-known Massachusetts



Receiving the highest award the 'Bharat Ratna' from Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the President of India in 1961.

Institute of Technology and a small Industrial Park at Das Nagar, Howrah with Japanese collaboration. One great highlight was Queen Elizabeth II's

visit to West Bengal. She visited the Durgapur Steel Plant built with the collaboration from British consortium, ISCON, and attended several programmes in Calcutta. She was given rousing ovation by enthusiastic crowds wherever she went. Dr. Roy took much interest in the programme, and supervised the details of all arrangements. There were also visit by President Tito of Yugoslavia, Prime Minister Khrushchev, President Brezhnev of USSR and other international dignitaries like the Crown Prince and Crown Princess of Japan, all adding to the international character of Calcutta as a world city, and Dr. Roy's own international stature. On 1 May 1961, the CMPO was set up with the Ford Foundation agreeing to meet the cost of the master plan for Calcutta, already known all over the world as an "urban disaster". Dr. Roy joined the nation in celebrating the birth centenary of Poet Rabindranath Tagore on 8 May 1961 and on this occasion announced the setting up of a new University, Rabindra Bharati, to be housed in the Tagore family home at



During Queen Elizabeth's visit

Jorasako, the establishment of a National Tagore Memorial Theatre (Rabindra Sadan) and the publication of the poet's complete works in eleven volumes at a reasonable price. While

laying the foundation stone of the National Theatre, Prime Minister Nehru said "Tagore was too big a man for our platitudes. The National Theatre would help to bring about national integration which Tagore talked about and fought for so often. Rabindranath was such a magnificent human being almost typical of the long line of India's wise men and Rishis and yet he was modern. He combined the wisdom of the old and the new." Dr. Roy persuaded Hiranmoy Banerjee, the Development Commissioner, a senior ICS officers with a creative outlook to become the founding Vice Chancellor of the Rabindra Bharati University and charged him with the task of developing young minds through the performing arts like music, dancing, dramatics or painting rather than studying conventional subjects in a conventional way.

Berubari

Dr. Roy's diplomacy and negotiating skill were demonstrated over his handling of the Berubari dispute during 1960-61. The Berubari union of Jalpaiguri district had been a subject matter of controversy since the Radcliff Award of 1947. The map given by Radcliff Award at the time of the partition of the country had shown this tiny area of 8.75 sq. miles with 12000 population as falling in Pakistan, whereas the description showed it as falling within India. Subsequently, the Noon-Nehru Agreement of 1957 tried to settle this controversy by giving the southern portions of Berubari to Pakistan while retaining the northern portion into India. As there was demand from Pakistan to implement the agreement and the Ministry of External Affairs also pressed for its implementation, there was furious outcry in West Bengal. Public opinion viewed it as yet another injustice by the Centre to the people of West Bengal. The Chief Minister complained that when the discussion between Nehru and Noon, Pakistan's Prime Minister was going on and it was decided to partition Berubari, the Chief Secretary, West Bengal and the Director of Land Records of West Bengal Government were kept away in the ante room and were not consulted. On 29 December 1960 the West Bengal Assembly passed a unanimous resolution which stated "without prejudice to the right of this Assembly to express its opinion on any Bill that may be brought before the Union Parliament for the purpose (realignment of boundaries between West Bengal and East Pakistan) and in view of the fact that the area known as Berubari Union in the district of

Jalpaiguri has been all along under the lawful possession and control of India and of the fact that any readjustment of the boundary which may result in the transfer of any part of the territory of the Berubari Union to East Pakistan will adversely affect the economic life and security of the people of the area, this Assembly is of the opinion that the said Berubari Union should remain a part of the territory of the Union of India".¹⁰⁸ Dr. Roy went to the length of taking the help of the Leader of the Opposition, Jyoti Basu, in drafting this resolution. Moving the resolution he said that "we have every right to tell the people of India that we do not want to part with Berubari Union not merely because of sentiment, but because it is an integral part of the country." When Parliament passed the Bill in December for transferring certain territories, including South Berubari, from India to Pakistan, the Bengal MPs including Law Minister Ashok Sen abstained. Somehow or the other it became a highly emotional issue in West Bengal, which was sure to have its impact on the next general elections to be held in 1962. Dr. Roy, while appreciating the point that the Nehru-Noon agreement had to be implemented regarding Berubari, wanted to keep the transfer in abeyance until the elections. All his political life he had shown respect to public feelings as on the issue of West Bengal - Bihar merger. Here also he took a public stand against Berubari's transfer. There were even moments of tension between him and Prime Minister Nehru. On one occasion, Dr. Roy telephoned Nehru and told him half jokingly to dismiss him and impose President's rule in West Bengal.¹⁰⁹ In any case, he was keen on avoiding this transfer till the 1962 elections and succeeded in his object in a masterly fashion partly helped by the High Court and the Supreme Court to which references were made by some people of Berubari who faced the prospect of transfer of citizenship against their wishes.

In June 1961, he had gifted his own house at 36 Wellington Street to the nation to be used as a charitable nursing home for the benefit of ailing poor people. He showed much ingenuity in conceiving of a nursing home where the income from the affluent patient would be used for looking after the free-bed patients. A charitable trust

108. West Bengal Assembly Proceedings, 1960.

109. As verbally told by R.N. Sengupta, (the then Deputy Secretary, Home Department and subsequently Chief Secretary to the West Bengal Government.) to the author.

was created named Aghore-Prakash Trust to commemorate his parents with B.M. Birla as the chairman of the Board of Trustees, with his nephews Subimal and Sukumar as among the trustees. At a function to celebrate his 80th birthday in July 1961, President Rajendra Prasad, while presenting him a commemorative book, said "Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy's life should be an object lesson for our people in general and the youth in particular. In all the spheres which he chose for himself, he worked his way up by sheer dint of perseverance and hard work." The President also stated, "the single weightiest factor in giving stability to West Bengal was the leadership of Dr. Roy as its Chief Minister and a devoted public worker. He is one of those Chief Ministers of our States who rarely feature in news. He devotes so much personal attention to his duties that he visits even a place like New Delhi only when he must or when he is called upon to see a dangerously ill VIP."¹¹⁰ Bidhan's reply on this occasion, full of modesty as usual, was "if I have succeeded in serving the State as Chief Minister it is to the extent that I have been able to identify myself with the people just as I have been successful as a physician to the extent I have identified myself with patients."

In a three-day conference of Chief Ministers in Delhi on national integration, he supported the conference's far-reaching decision that there should be one common script adopted by the whole country and that script would be Hindi to be introduced in gradual stages. A broad based conference of leaders and representatives of all points of view-political, cultural, social, educational and other organizations and schools of thought - was decided upon to be convened at a later date. On the language issue, while State language would be language in any State, if in any district 60 per cent or more of the population belong to a minority language then the minority language would be official language for that district, in addition to the State language.

Efforts to Make Coal Mining a State Subject

On his return to Calcutta, he made yet another pioneering move which inspired all coal-producing states. He asserted the right of the State Government to start coal mines. In his view, "it (coal) was the State's property, and the State should do it as it was a question of life

110. Chakraborty, S.

and death for Bengal.” He created a Directorate of Mining headed by Mining Adviser for exploitation of minerals like coal, dolomite and China clay and argued strongly that only the State government should grant new licences for coal exploration and fix up royalties on coal mining. He convened a meeting of Chief Ministers of coal producing states and took up with the Prime Minister the issue of coal licensing and royalty on coal. Unfortunately, his death came in a few months and coal could not become a State subject as he would have wished.

The passing of the West Bengal Official Language Act 1961 was a land mark event. Bengali was to replace English as the official language everywhere except the three hill sub-divisions of Darjeeling district where Nepali was to become the official language. But this was not at the expense of English which was to continue as a compulsory subject of study in schools.

Last Visit to Europe and USA

On 2 July, 1961 Dr. Roy went to Europe for the last time. He had been thinking how to step up the production of coal in West Bengal as coal was vitally necessary for the industrialization of the country. Also he was toying with the idea of the state government entering into coal mining. He went to Poland to study the working of coal mines which were equipped with modern machinery. The coal mines in that country were the deepest in the world. He himself went down to a mine which worked at a depth of 11,000 ft. and saw the working underground. In reply to a question about mine safety the manager told him that accidents were fairly frequent in mine pits and no foolproof method was available to anticipate them beforehand. Dr. Roy then went to West Germany and visited the factory at Karl Steel & Co in connection with possible collaboration with Durgapur Coke Oven Plant which needed updating of the processes.. He also went to Pittsburg and saw the mansion where the truce at the end of the Second World War was signed.

Meeting with US President Kennedy

From Europe he went to U.S.A. on a variety of missions. An appointment was fixed for him to meet President Kennedy on 7 August 1961. When Dr. Roy arrived at White House, the President was having

routine medical check up. On hearing that Dr. Roy had arrived Mr. Kennedy asked his aides to usher him in as he was aware of Dr. Roy's reputation as a physician. Kennedy requested Dr. Roy to examine him. Dr. Roy readily agreed and took the same stethoscope which was being used by the specialist and at once pointed out that it was defective and asked for a replacement. Before a new one could be brought, he started examining Kennedy by putting his ears on his chest. The President was rather curious to know how Dr. Roy detected that the instrument was defective. Dr. Roy smiled and suggested that someone should get the instrument checked up. This was immediately done and to everybody's surprise, Dr. Roy's findings proved correct. The instrument had indeed some defects. Kennedy also told him about the chronic back pain he was suffering from ever since he had been injured while serving in a submarine during the World War. Dr. Roy prescribed some treatment and received a letter from the U.S. President on his return to Calcutta that he was already feeling much better after following the treatment suggested by Dr. Roy.¹¹¹

He secured handsome assistance for Calcutta from the UN Special Fund, the Ford Foundation and several other agencies during his visit to the U.S.A. and his meeting with President Kennedy. The New York Herald Tribune gave him a great tribute when it wrote.¹¹² "So great is the shadow thrown by Calcutta across the Indian subcontinent that restoration of the city has been called essential to the well-being of the entire community. Failure to restore it to health could jeopardize the place for economic growth in India despite billions of dollars spent there on other causes than urban." He also discussed with the Paris Metro Company the prospect of a Calcutta Underground Railway Scheme. This was to materialize with Russian collaboration two decades after Dr. Roy.

Dr. Roy was sometimes accused by his political opponents for frequently travelling abroad. He did travel, but usually for treatment of his eyes and seldom more than once a year. But he always used these visits to locate parties who could be encouraged to invest in

111. Ibid page 256.

112. Ibid.

Bengal e.g. negotiation with the Yugoslav authorities to help in a project for filling the Salt Lake area with alluvial deposits dredged from the Hooghly river and building a new township to ease pressure on Calcutta, talks with the Ford Foundation to help setting up a CMPO and CMDA, his plan for introducing trolley buses in Calcutta. But the point to emphasize is that he always maintained a scrupulous distinction between personal travels where he insisted on meeting all expenses from his personal funds. He scrupulously avoided passing on his personal expenses to Government accounts; a lesson for many other politicians in Government positions. In 1960, when Governor Padmaja Naidu wanted to replace her old imported car with a new one and one Plymouth car was imported, Dr. Roy also wanted the same model car to be imported for his own use, but insisted on paying for it from his own funds, although he could easily have got it imported as the Chief Minister's official car. Not only did he leave a very lucrative practice, as already stated, to come to politics for public service, but steadily ran down his personal savings to meet the demands of public service for the charity that he was accustomed to. Unlike most politicians of today he was refreshingly free from a tendency to pass on his private expenses to public funds or to take 'cuts' in the name of party funds from all big contracts etc. entered into by the Government.

The single biggest achievement of Dr. Bidhan Roy was turning West Bengal, popularly called the "problem state" in 1948 into an economically developed (by far number one State in this respect) and politically stable State by the beginning of the decade of the sixties. The war, the 1943 famine, the communal holocausts of 1946-47, the large scale movements of people in panic from across the border and the resultant problem of relief and rehabilitation of millions of uprooted people, the loss of nearly two-third of undivided Bengal and the resultant dislocations in industry, and communication had created enormous, almost insoluble problems for the young truncated state left in three unconnected portions. But Dr. Roy, like a true doctor, went about his task as a helmsman with single-minded devotion and determination diagnosing various ills and coming out with appropriate prescriptions. As the great doctor unfolded one scheme after another many critics called them impractical. The left opposition invariably opposed them to gain political points. Yet most of them succeeded and

a few like Andaman and Dandakaranya only partially succeeded. By 1960-61, i.e. twelve years after Bidhan had assumed responsibility as Premier (later Chief Minister), West Bengal was very different from what she was in 1948, no longer a problem state but perhaps the most economically advanced state in India. The budget size increased several times. The revenue receipts of only Rs. 32 crores in 1948-49 had multiplied about ten times by 1961-62. Enormous irrigation schemes ranging from Damodar Valley Corporation, the giant to the small sized Sonarpur-Arapench Scheme for reclaiming chronically water-logged areas in south 24 Parganas, and use of imported seeds and fertilizers had pushed up agricultural production substantially. Power supply had registered visible improvements, and both industry and agriculture received their due share. Industrial growth, both in the private sector and the public sector, had been highly impressive. Indeed, West Bengal's GDP was by far the highest among the States. Dr. Roy had also taken personal interest in a variety of innovative things like deep-sea fishing in the Bay of Bengal with imported trawlers, reviving Midnapore's sagging salt industry, bee-keeping industry, mat industry, handmade paper industry, sericulture and silk, and a milk colony, for Calcutta with the removal of Khatalas. Unfortunately, his great vision was not shared by those who succeeded him with the result that a State which, under Bidhan's leadership, had become the most economically developed state started on a steady downhill journey soon after his passing away which has not been arrested ever since.

Dr. Roy was quoted by his contemporaries as saying that the Bengalees lacked entrepreneurship qualities and would not be able to set up their own business enterprises. He therefore concentrated on establishing a chain of large-scale enterprises, which would at least provide them with jobs. Durgapur Steel Plant, Chittaranjan Locomotives, Durgapur Projects, Durgapur Chemicals and Kalyani spinning were some of those enterprises. He, along with Nehru, envisaged Damodar Valley to be the Ruhr Valley of India. Also he planned Kalyani Township, Haringhata Dairy project, Salt Lake City, Eastern Bypass, Bandal Power Plant, Santeldihi Power Plant and even Kolaghat Power Project. He gave immense encouragement to private sector growth. Hundreds of new enterprises came up in the greater Calcutta area and in Asansol-Durgapur belt West Bengal's

economy was booming by the early 1960s. Unemployment was a thing of the past. Calcutta had recovered from the dislocation caused by the partition and had reasserted her position as India's premier metropolitan city pulsating with life. But this boom was not destined to survive its creator.

General Elections 1962

Meanwhile, another General election was round the corner. Dr. Roy as a special case was allowed by the Congress to contest from two constituencies, viz. Chowringhee in Calcutta and Saltora in Bankura district. This was a singular exception in the whole of country. Congress President, Sanjiva Reddy, justified this by saying, "Dr. Roy is Dr. Roy. The choice is left to him. An exception is being made in his case and he is being allowed to contest from both the constituencies if he so desires." Inaugurating the Congress election campaign at Bankura on 1 October, 1961 Dr. Roy stated "West Bengal's economy has been laid on sound footing by the completion of two Five Year Plans. We have now launched a Third Plan with a bigger outlay. In regard to both the earlier plans, the target of expenditure previously fixed has been exceeded. This was possible because of the unsatisfied support and cooperation we have received from the people of the State who have realised that it is the Congress alone which could make the country a welfare state. The masses have now become plan-minded, and they want faster progress in the work of rebuilding the country." On 4 November 1961 he visited Saltora and justified his selecting a backward rural constituency with the following words, "I do not like to keep myself engaged with problems of cities only. Nearly 80% of the total population lives in villages. Their problems also must be faced with seriousness and determination"¹¹³. Around the same time, after he had finalised discussion with the French consulting firm on the Durgapur Chemicals, he said in a sort of soliloquy. "I have a vision. If I live for a couple of years more, I will encourage young graduates to set up rows of cottage type industries on both sides of the Ganges and Durgapur canal. I will give them land, I will give them capital and power at subsidised rates. They will get basic chemicals, steel, iron and coal from Durgapur. I have complete faith in the capacity and

113. Chakraborty S. My Years with Dr. B.C. Roy Page 246.

intellect of Bengalee youth and once I am able to turn their mind to take this type of industries, I shall be able to tackle the gigantic educated unemployment problem. That way lies the salvation.”¹¹⁴ Alas, this remained an unrealised vision, as he was to leave this mortal world in a few months.

Dr. Roy launched a whirlwind election campaign all over West Bengal visiting the districts. He was accompanied by Atulya Ghosh. Once after a hectic tour he came to office in the afternoon and was going through the accumulated files on his table when Ranajit Gupta, Chief Secretary, dropped in. Dr. Roy asked him to sit down and told him about certain matters which were brought to his notice by local officials/people. Then he added “Look here yesterday when we were on the Grand Trunk Road, I pointed at a distant village and wanted to know its name from Atulya. He not only told me its name but also its approximate population, how many tube wells were there and other details. I very much feel like living in a village free from all worries and anxieties.” Then he told the Chief Secretary, “Perhaps your district magistrates do not keep so much information.”¹¹⁵

In the third General Elections, held in February 1962, the Congress was returned with an absolute majority securing 166 seats in a house of 280. It got 22 out of 36 Lok Sabha seats. Dr. Roy was returned from both the seats viz. Chowringhee in Calcutta and Saltora in Bankura, he contested with convincing majority. He was elected leader of the Congress Assembly Party and was invited by Governor Padmaja Naidu to form the Cabinet. He now went to Digha accompanied by P.C. Sen, K.P. Mukherjee and Atulya Ghosh to have a few days’ rest and also to do his Ministry-making. His fourth cabinet was sworn in on 11 March with 14 Cabinet Ministers, 11 Ministers of State and 10 Deputy Ministers. He straightaway resumed his work of creating a “prosperous Bengal in a prosperous India” with renewed vigour. The present author, who was Under Secretary (Home) to the Government of West Bengal at that time, recalls seeing him engrossed in his chamber with lots of charts and tables on the per capita availability of food grains, milk and livestock and devising

114. Ibid.

115. Remniscences of Sudhir Madhav Bose.

measures about how to quadruple these figures in the next five years. There was writ large on his face an optimistic vision, which was infectious. But he was also concerned about the health of Nehru. On 4 April, he flew to Delhi for one day to examine Nehru who had been re-elected as the leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party on the day before. The story goes that he advised his patient to discontinue most of the medicines and to take water of green coconut which he promised to send from Calcutta every day. The following letter¹¹⁶ of the 13 April 1962 illustrates how the doctor Chief Minister was seeing himself in the role of a guardian angel for Pandit Nehru in respect of his well-being :

A little bird whispers into my ears that you are inclined to go back to your rush work again. I do not know to what extent you have been able to recover your strength and health by going to Dehra Dun. But I would like to make a few suggestions at this stage.

I think you will realise that your recent illness has been due to the fact of your getting a little fever, which is the result of some small infection with any of the bacteria. This was sufficient to make you bed-ridden for more than a fortnight. Why is that so? The position is that although your kidneys are not in any sense inflamed or directly affected, they are showing the wear and tear of life earlier than other organs of the body. The result has been that during the fever all the waste products, which we call seetabolics could not be expelled from the system quick enough and that is why, it took a long time to shake off your weakness and fever, although the fever was not very high at any moment. I do not think that apart from the blood pressure which sometimes goes a little high, there is any other trouble in your body at the present moment except the power of elimination of waste products from your system.

I have put the case in the form in the above

116. NMML Archives, New Delhi, Dr. B.C. Roy papers.

parragraph because I wanted you to realise that any physical or menatal exertion is bound to increase the waste products in the system and while there s this difficulty of elimination by the kidneys, it is likely that any such accumulation of waste products in the system will cause weakness. It is essential, therefore, that:

You should avoid taking up any work which can reasonably be avoided, e.g. your tendency to attend functions and meet people anywhere,

Avoid giving long speeches to the crowd at all imaginary places so far as your own work is concerned. I realise it is very difficult for you to avoid mental work and, therefore whatever is absolutely essential for you to do and which you cannot avoid you should do it. But I would request you to judge for yourself to what extent you can avoid exerting yourself and taking up extra responsibilities. It is only those duties and responsibilities which you alone can perform that need to be taken up by you. For this purpose no body can give you any instruction or guidance except you yourself. You had asked me how is it that I have been able to keep my strength. It is because I do not take up those functions which I can avoid in spite of the fact that I am told some times that I am not cooperative. There are certain things which I can do and no one else can; there are certain things which I can do but others also can do. It is for me to judge what work I should do. I do not propose to give you any lecture about yourself and I would request you to concentrate your energy for those objects which you cannot avoid undertaking.

Malda Disturbances

Shortly after the election, towards the end of April 1962, there was a recurrence of communal violence in the district of Malda along with several parts of East Pakistan like Rajshahi, Dinajpur

and even Dhaka. The press in Pakistan mischievously presented the Malda rioting as a full scale killing of Muslims and this agitated fanatic elements in East Pakistan. The resultant rioting led to the flight of a large number of refugees, mostly tribal Santhals, from East Pakistan to Malda. The Chief Minister arranged to send all the new refugees by special trains straight away to Dandakaranya area. Dandakaranya, by then, had developed into a string of townships and clusters of rural settlements of refugees spread over the two states of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa which were humming with activity. Where there had been forests, wild animals and inhospitable terrain only about five years ago, there were now flourishing paddy fields and organized villages. The tribal refugees from East Bengal could be easily accommodated there. Dr. Roy had spared a number of competent officers from West Bengal for the Project and took personal interest in the development of the multi-purpose land development projects. He was working round the clock even in the last few months of his life like a true *Karmayogi*.

In a letter ¹¹⁷ to Nehru on June 21, 1962 he was referring to the exodus of Santal Tribes from East Pakistan.

I have received your cheque for Rs.5,000 for the Malda people. Thank you very much for it.

Kali Babu is going tomorrow to Malda. I have also given from my own relief fund Rs.2000 and with this some relief will be possible. I will send 11 bales of dhotis and saris- six bales from Birla's cloth mill and five from another mill. That will do for the present. But what I have been trying to say is that these people are out in the open and we cannot leave them under a tree during this rainy season all the time, but if we put up any structure the chances are that the men will never leave their shelter. On the other hand, as you say, if they got to Dandakarnaya and if the messages goes to East Pakistan, then lakhs of people might be coming over here, I do not think one need be

117. NMML; New Delhi, Dr. B.C. Roy papers. And also Chakraborty S. op. cit pp. 383-84.

very particular about this matter. About seven to eight millions Hindus are still remaining in East Pakistan because they cannot leave their hearth and home. These men are Santhals belonging to Rajshahi district and have actually been driven out by the Pakistan people. They form a different group. I do not think that by giving a place in Dandakarnaya, we will call in or invite lakhs of people from East Pakistan, but in any case something must be done.

Just now I spoke to Ghanshyam Das Birla. As you know, they are having an aluminium plant at Rihand Dam, about which he had spoken to you. I understand that you had suggested going there towards the end of July. Probably it would be better if you went there during the winter season. The reason is that the airstrip near Rihand Dam is not usable during the rainy season and, therefore, if you want to go in July you will have to get down at Mirzapur and then drive about 956 miles. Now this is one of the instances about which I had already spoken to you. In spite of the fact that Mr. G.D.Birla is sitting across my desk I must tell you that you should avoid going to Rihand Dam. Are there not any other persons amongst the galaxy of your ministers who can go and open the Plant at Rihand Damm and save you the exhaustion? I have told you very clearly that it is not desirable that you should undertake any strenuous task during the next year, which you can avoid easily. Any other Minister can do the job. Why should you exert yourself and expose yourself to physical difficulties? Please think it over.

In between these two letters to Nehru he had inaugurated two important projects. The first was Rs.20 crores Salt Lake Reclamation and Rural Development Project with collaboration from a Yugoslav firm (April 16) which he considered very important for the future of Calcutta. It was an innovative idea to pump the slit dredged out from

the bed of the Hooghly river into the marshy salt lakes to the East and North-East of the metropolitan city and reclaim this area for satellite city. On April 20, he drove to Bandel, accompanied by U.S. Ambassador Galbraith, to commission the 300 M.W Bandel Power Plant with long term U.S assistance.

The people of West Bengal were accustomed by that time to looking up to Dr. Roy and hoping that the progress the state had made in the past would not only be maintained but would continue to be accelerated under his able stewardship. The Chief Minister was generating more speed in his work and working harder than before. But unknown to others, his great life was ebbing away. According to the recollections of his close aides,¹¹⁸ sometimes, it looked as though he was deeply brooding over some thing. At times, he appeared very calm and quiet. Even when he failed to do precisely what he wanted, he did not take any official to task and used to talk to them in a softer tone. He entrusted his ministers with a number of responsibilities obviously to keep himself comparatively free. An outstanding physician, he perhaps had a premonition that he would soon be leaving for the land from where nobody returns.

Bidhan Chandra Roy's relationship with the civil servants was worth emulation by political executives. He gave them respect and they, in their turn, gave him total loyalty. Whenever there were problems he would try to take a balanced approach, neither going out of his way to side with the politician, nor upholding the civil servant to the point of running down a politician. In a crisis situation or a confrontation, he would often diffuse the situation with his dry humour like, for instance, telling a politician who was complaining of an officer smoking at him "Why don't you turn your eyes away from the officer who was smoking?" Once he gave his trust to an official, he trusted him fully, and also defended him from attacks by politicians and the press. Cases in point were Chief Secretary, S.N.Ray and later on Ranjit Gupta, Education Director of Publicity P.S. Mathur, Calcutta Police Commissioner P.K.Sen, his own Deputy Secretary S.M.Bose, Commerce and Industry Secretary Benoy Dasgupta and after him H.N.Ray. All those officials who worked closely with

118. S.M. Bose, his Deputy Secretary.

him recall the years of Dr. Roy with lot of fondness as if it was a golden age that would never come back.¹¹⁹

Unfortunately, none of Bidhan's successors in West Bengal possessed his great vision or his missionary zeal to get his dream realized. Inevitably the state that Bidhan left as a front ranking State in India steadily went downhill eventually acquiring the lable of a backward State.

His last Day in Office

Dr. Roy went to office for the last time on 24 June 1962. Swami Buddhananda of Neepmith Ramakrishna Mission was to have an interview with him in the evening. The Swamiji brought up several local development schemes before him for his sanction, e.g. road from Jaynagore to Jamtola- a distance of about 12 miles, an electrification scheme of the area. In all Swamiji had eleven applications. Dr. Roy humorously asked him how many more schemes he had in his bag. Before Swamiji could reply, Dr. Roy in an apologetic voice said that he was running temperature and was feeling uneasy. Swami Buddhananda reluctantly produced the last application of the setting up of a chest clinic. He then suggested that he could take leave for that evening and come back the next day. Dr. Roy said "I may not come to office. Get every scheme you have cleared". This premonition proved tragically true. He cleared the last scheme for a chest clinic.

On the next day, i.e. Saturday (25 June), he felt unwell after he had finished seeing his daily quota of 10 male and 6 female patients. As his uneasiness persisted, he had to cut short his stay in Writers' Buildings and returned home early. Chest experts and other medical men were called in, among them his bosom friend Col. Lalit Mohan Banerjee. They diagnosed it as a case of heart attack. He had an earlier attack in 1954, but he recovered fast. He had to cancel seeing his patients during the next few days and cut down visitors to a bare minimum on the advice of the cardiologists. He went on attending to urgent and important official work throughout the period of his illness. He even held a weekly cabinet meeting on June 29, his last cabinet meeting. As the Ministers took leave of their ailing leader one by one, none of them knew that this was their final farewell.

On the morning of 30 June Dr. Roy had discussions with some ministers and officers. In the afternoon he discussed a collaboration

119. Recollections of S. M. Bose.

proposal for the establishment of a plant for the basic manufacture of magnesium hydrochloride in West Bengal with the representative of a firm from U.S.A. Later he wrote to Nityananda Kanungo, Central Minister for Commerce and Industries, recommending to the Government of India for such a plant. This was the last letter he had written before his demise.¹²⁰ It was known that the Central Government had acceded to his last request.

On the same day he recommended the case of a bright but poor student to Dr. Triguna Sen, Vice Chancellor, Jadavpur University for admission in the University. His 81st birthday was to be celebrated on 1 July, and the President of India, Dr. Radhakrishnan, was specially coming to Calcutta by train to attend the public function at the Mahajati Sadan. As providence would have it, this was to turn into his farewell meeting to a friend for four decades. On his arrival at Howrah Station on 30 June he came straight to see the ailing Dr. Roy at his residence, accompanied by Governor Padmaja Naidu. They were together for about 15 minutes. After meeting the ailing leader the President told the press "Dr. Roy looks much better". But clearly he did not know the correct situation. The truth was that Dr. Roy's cardiac condition was going worse. Here is an eye witness account from his biographer.¹²¹ He told his friend Col. L.M. Banerjee "You may be a good surgeon, but what do you know of heart cases? I have been treating heart cases for more than 30 years and I know what is exactly what. No medicine can do me any good." On that fateful Sunday, July 1 he got up at 7 a.m. after a restful night. He read his Upanisadic prayer hymns as usual for about 10 minutes. As people came from far and near to wish him many happy returns of the day and get his blessings they were told that it was not possible for him to see any one and they only saw a message signed by him which was put up at the gate. It read as follows "According to the advice of doctors it is not possible for me to receive your congratulations and good wishes personally on my birthday. I reciprocate the same and request my friend to accept my heart-felt thanks and I pray for your well being."

He smiled at his nephew Sukumar and his daughter, Jaya and

120. Reminiscences of Shri S.M. Bose.

121. Chakraborty S. My Years with B.C. Roy, pp. 384-397.

spoke to them as they come to see him. He asked for his usual glass of fresh mausambi juice and took it with relish. Meanwhile the team of doctors, among them his old friend Dr. L.M. Banerjee, came in quick succession and realized that he was critically ill and was sinking. On hearing of Dr. Banerjee's arrival he mumbled "He is my teacher. I have learnt so many things from him". He looked serene and composed lying on his bed with his head on a high pillow. He told one of his close associates, A.N. Halder, "I have lived a full life. I have fulfilled my mission. There is nothing more for me to do."^{121a} Perhaps these were the last words he spoke. Around 11.30 he had a massive cardiac arrest. He asked for medicine and oxygen and was given both. At 11.55, while still holding the oxygen tent himself, he breathed his last. He turned his eyes both sides looking at everyone and closed his eyes sinking on the right. Like Gautam Buddha, Bidhan also died on the same calendar date on which he was born. The physician who had administered curative medicine to thousands for nearly five decades did not respond to any curative medicine any more. Also, by an irony, he became the first patient in his house, which he had willed to be a clinic.

As the All India Radio announced the news in a special bulletin at 12 noon, the whole nation was sad. West Bengal was stunned. National flag was flown half-mast throughout the country. So great was the rush of people, men and women of all ages, anxious to see the hero of hundred battles in his eternal sleep that it became a problem to keep the surging crowd under control. The body was later taken to the Assembly House to allow the vast multitude who began to pour in from districts in trains, buses, taxis and in fact, by every mode of transport to pay their homage to the great leader. At 6.30 on the following morning (2 July) President Dr. Radhakrishnan, who had come to preside over his birthday celebration but was decreed by Fate to preside over his funeral, instead again paid his last respect on his own behalf and on behalf of millions of his country men. It was a unique distinction to be bidden 'farewell' by the President of the Nation. The vast crowd within and outside the campus of the Assembly building bowed and shouted "Bande Mataram" when the flower-bedecked cot was placed on the bier.

^{121a}. Ibid.

Thereafter the funeral procession started from the Assembly House. The presence of Defence Minister Krishna Menon and the Cabinet Secretary S.S. Khera on behalf of the Government of India at the funeral further added to the solemnity of the occasion. As the funeral procession started every available space on both sides of the road was jam-packed with people to pay their last homage to the departed leader. From the Assembly the procession went past Writers Buildings, Calcutta University and Calcutta Corporation, scenes of Dr. Roy's work, and next down the Chowringhee Road on to Keratala Burning Ghat which had been the resting place of many distinguished sons of the nation like C.R. Das and Assutosh Mukherjee. Another illustrious son now joined the pantheon.

Bidhan, The Man

People often wondered what sort of man was there behind the exterior of this workaholic bachelor, this hard task master, this no-nonsense person who worked from 6 AM to 10 PM without any break and who was seldom seen in social functions except on special occasions. On one occasion, when he was gently requested to retire from his files by his biographer because it was late at night and he had been working for hours, he asked, “who will then do my work?”¹²² When the biographer retorted that if he had a wife this could not happen, he said to his biographer, “But then don’t you know that I am wedded to my work”. And yet Bidhan was an intense family man, emotionally attached to his brothers, his nephews and nieces and a few selected friends, mostly contemporary medical men, who were the only few with whom he could relax. In his spare time he would visit his brothers and spend time with his nephews and nieces like Justice Subimal Roy or Mrs. Renu Chakraborty (then Deputy Leader of the Communist Party in the Lok Sabha) and their children. He would often play with the children and would always bring for them sweets and toys from his tours. In general, he was fond of children. Apart from friends in politics like Nalini Ranjan Sarkar and Kiran Sankar Roy, there were only a few life-long friends like Col. Lalit Mohan Banerjee, Col. J.L. Sen and his wife Mrs. Bela Sen with whom he could relate socially, relax, crack jokes and in general unburden himself. With Col. Banerjee, his closest friend, he had a spiritual affinity, one a devout Christian and the other a devout Brahmo. This friendship lasted till Bidhan’s last breath.

After the death of Nalini Ranjan Sarkar he held the Finance portfolio for many years. He also combined with it the portfolio of Development and Planning and often Commerce and Industry and

122. Thomas K.P. op cit. p 249.

Home, (except Police and Transport). All this meant nearly three fourth of the Departments of the Government of West Bengal. Thus it would not be an exaggeration to say that despite having a Council of Ministers of thirty or so, Dr. Roy shouldered the major share of the burden of the State Government and could claim the credit for whatever success his administration achieved in fifteen years. On one occasion, when an MLA charged in the Assembly that the Chief Minister controlled forty five percent of finances, he characteristically retorted "I say Sir, he is entirely wrong. I control cent per cent of the State's finances as the Finance Minister. Besides, I know about the finances of all other departments. My colleagues consult me. I trust my colleagues and they trust me. Ours is a collective responsibility."¹²³ He was at times accused of dominating the Government and having his finger in every pie. This was perhaps partially true. But if one appreciates the circumstances of his early years in charge of West Bengal-the border problem, the refugee problem, the problems of economic and commercial dislocation, transport bottlenecks in the truncated province, communal violence, intrigues from within the Congress, and Communist subversion - one can excuse him if he felt that he needed to be the ultimate decision maker in all these delicate issues. This habit continued afterwards. After he lost his two trusted colleagues - Kiran Sankar Roy and Nalini Ranjan Sarkar - he had to shoulder the responsibilities of both Home and Finance for the greater part of his rule. Part of the problem was that his ministerial colleagues felt dwarfed in relation to his towering personality and would feel safe to leave major decisions to him. He did rule West Bengal as a zamindar governs his zamindari. Even when he was abroad he would like Ministers and officials to call him on phone to brief him and to seek his guidance on major issues. But one point must be emphasized. After the initial years of dissidence in the Congress, he left the West Bengal Congress to the care of Atulya Ghosh. There was perfect understanding between the two, marked by correct behaviour. Atulya Ghosh was never seen in Writers' Building, nor known to interact with officials. Dr. Roy was not seen in the Congress Bhawan except on special occasions, nor known to express any preference about who should be the Congress candidate from any particular Assembly seat.

123. Ibid p. 248.

In switching on from an exceedingly lucrative medical practice to a political office, Dr. Roy had to make enormous sacrifices and adjustment in his personal life. He had a phenomenal income as a practising physician. In December 1947 the figure was Rs. 42,000.¹²⁴ From this level to come down to Rs. 14,000/ a month i.e. the monthly salary he had fixed for himself, was a difficult transition. It was very hard on his private staff. Most of the princely income he had earned had been spent in charities or in meeting the deficit of hospitals he had been attached with and in financing the Congress programmes from time to time. Even as Chief Minister he continued his small charities and continued seeing patients every day, but now without any fee. He had therefore to cut down on his charity, although till his very end not one in need who approached him for financial help ever returned empty-handed. He had to maintain his sizeable personal staff whom he did not put as part of the Chief Minister's Secretariat, a practice that grew up subsequently. Nor could he now support his patients who needed money to buy medicine or poor students who got financial help from him. He was therefore compelled to sell his land in suburban Calcutta, all his shares in companies including those of which he was founder Chairman, and finally his palatial house in Shillong "Ray Villa" to which he was emotionally attached. Slowly but surely he was developing a sense of neither extravagant nor luxurious in his life style, although he amassed enormous hard-earned wealth. Remembering his own childhood and student days, he was always helpful to others.

One of his greatest qualities was that he was always pleasant, although somewhat shy and withdrawn. Even in the midst of great tensions, he himself was not tense, and always looked relaxed and smiling. He would also abhor argumentation. Though he would not like any one to straightaway controvert him on a point he had made but when the same point was made on paper with arguments, facts and figures he would accept it and abandon his own earlier position.

He was an exceedingly handsome person, even in his old age. Once Sarojini Naidu, referring to how Dr. Roy's very presence inspired confidence in the ailing daughter-in law of the Nizam of Hyderabad

124. Ibid p. 10.

told Gandhiji “Dr. Roy’s face is his asset”. On another occasion, sitting in a group, Mrs. Naidu quipped, “Dr. Roy, you are a man nearing 50 and you still have dimples on your face”. Dr. Roy’s prompt retort was “And you are a woman about 50 and you still notice it”. Mrs. Diana Menuhin, the wife of the famous pianist, Yehudi Menuhin, once described him as a “magnificent brigand” in a letter to Nehru after she had a brief meeting with Dr. Roy at Zurich in 1954.¹²⁵

At home he had two companions, one an old friend Manu Halder and the other his Jeeves, Kartik. He spent his leisure hours reading books not only on medical subjects, but also on a variety of subjects like literature, economics, history, politics and engineering. His prepared speeches bore testimony to his universal scholarship, a general mark of the educated people of the Indian renaissance age to which he belonged and also showed meticulous preparation. He was also fond of playing cards, particularly “patience”, as this would take his mind completely off his work. He would take a short vacation in a hill station after every busy spell of work. From 1945 he suffered from chronic eye troubles. Once a year, he would go to Europe or America combining the treatment of his eyes with negotiations at various centres for schemes for West Bengal’s improvement. He had two eye operations, once in Vienna in 1949 and once in Darjeeling in 1960. In fact his eyes gave him trouble as he advanced in years and as Chief Minister in later years he used a magnifying glass to read. He valued beauty and had a fascination for hills, trees and flowers, and also for listening to good music. Looking some times introvert and formidable outside, in his heart of hearts he was a soft, shy and charming person illustrating the Sanskrit saying ‘*Vajradapi Kathorani Mriduni Kusumadapi*’ (Hard as the thunder, and soft as a flower).

Above every thnig else he was a doctor, and forever retained his diagnostic and problem-solving approach. Thus not only would he advise a dying patient to leave his property for setting up a hospital to cure a disease that was taking his life, but would nurse him till the end. When a young man died and his relations refused to cremate his body, he himself, a Brahmo, with the help of another lady, a Christian, took the body to the burning ghat in his own car at the dead of night,

125. Chakraborty, S.-My Years with Dr. B.C. Roy, p. 1.

arranged to get the wood and other necessary materials, cremated the body and arranged his death certificate.¹²⁶ For him whatever had to be done must be done sooner than later and he would not shirk any responsibility that came his way. The way in which he thereafter carried out this young patient's will and set up the Jadavpur TB Hospital is a long story.¹²⁷ Wherever he was at home or abroad, he for ever combined his role of a political and governmental leader with that of a doctor. He was in the habit of inquiring about the health of all those who were around and would help any one who needed help for medical treatment.

The following anecdotes illustrate how his name as a physician-surgeon was a legend. Once Lord Attlee made a startling disclosure to Ananda Gopal Mukerjee, a Congress leader "You people know Bidhan as one of the best physicians of the world, but most of you people do not know his proficiency in surgery. Here is Gordon (Sir Eric Gorden, an eminent Parliamentarian) who sustained a fracture of his knee in Bombay during his visit to India due to an accidental fall. He was flown immediately to Calcutta for treatment under Bidhan. Bidhan set right his disjoined knee and you see how Eric can now walk like any other usual man".

We have already stated how even when he was on a visit to President Kennedy to discuss World Bank and U.S. assistance for Calcutta's urban renewal and development, his advice was asked for casually by the U.S. President about a bone injury he had sustained and how Dr. Roy prescribed a course of treatment which helped Kennedy and that his backache had been cured after following Dr. Roy's treatment, and thanking him profusely.

Another incident during the Quit India Movement of 1942 needs narration. Once Dr. Roy was requested to go to the house of some one he knew to treat a guest. Nobody told him who that guest was. Dr. Roy went to the house, treated the guest and calmly mentioned before he left "Jai Prakash, you should leave Calcutta as soon as possible, otherwise the police are bound to arrest you." Although

126. Thomas K.P. op cit. page 259-60.

127. Ibid.

Jaiprakash was in disguise, Dr. Roy's discerning eye could recognize him straight away.¹²⁸

One of the greatest qualities of Bidhan Chandra was that he was never angry or agitated, and even in the midst of very depressing situations he never showed irritation or confusion. This helped him considerably in decision-making further aided by his great intelligence, formidable knowledge of men and things, a rare analytical mind with precision and his willingness to study in depth any issue that came his way. In his own words "My experience as Chief Minister of West Bengal during a very trying period, has convinced me that to run a successful administration certain definite approaches to human activities have to be secured. How far these approaches could be traced as being due to one or other of the factors mentioned in the questionnaire is difficult of assessment. To run an administration one must possess a stout heart, a determination to do or die, a preparedness to sacrifice one's ambition or lust of power for the sake of the common weal, a clear vision of the future, a knowledge of human beings and of mass psychology, a readiness to take some risks for the sake of the ideal, after carefully considering all its implications."

"My earliest memory goes to the time when, hardly a boy of five, I was attracted to a board on the bare walls of my parents' house which said 'Don't say I can't do it'. This generated a deep feeling in me that I must not accept defeat, however big the stake be. To do a job it was necessary to put one's best efforts remembering the maxim of my teacher in Dr. Lukis: 'It is better to have tried and failed than never to have tried to all'. Such efforts generate in one a great potential strength which can later on be utilized even if the immediate objective is beyond one's reach. Greatly akin to the idea was the great teaching of another master, Col. Charles, 'whatever thy hands findeth to do, do it with thy might'. Not only must we try our best, we must do it with all our might and if we fail, it is better to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all. Gandhiji, following the teaching of the Gita, also taught us that 'our only right was to be able to work, the results did not matter'.

"My contact with human beings in health or disease,

128. Reminiscences of an old acquaintance.

individually and in groups, has given me a deep insight into the manner human minds work. This again is a great help to an administrator. Such knowledge of human beings was derived from my work both as a medical practitioner and as a politician. But apart from this, the necessity of placing the interests of others over those of one's own was realized by me because of my being in politics and in the profession. If we are to serve a patient we must not consider our own comfort or interest. If we are to serve the people, the interests of the masses should be paramount and much greater than one's own personal interests or ambition. One has to merge oneself willingly, consciously and voluntarily into the 'Many' if one wants to be a good administrator."

"Early in my political life, Deshbandhu told me that 'Power is a Goddess, do not attempt to woo or pursue her, she will elude you. Kick at her and she will follow you'. This was the great secret of Deshbandhu's success as a politician. This again made a great impression on my mind when I took up the work of administrator."

"Socrates once said that the greatest ideal of a man should be 'know thyself'. Knowledge of men and things is an essential attribute of an administrator. But in order to understand others, one must understand one's own self. My connection with educational affairs and institutions gave me the key to this knowledge. I am never satisfied with what I know. I try to seek knowledge from all sources and from all the four winds of Heaven."

"But the administrator, especially one who has to deal with a developing State, has to take risks - careful risks if you like - in order that he might succeed in developing the State. West Bengal, in common with the rest of India, had been for two centuries under the tutelage of a system of administration devised by the British, wherein State enterprises or State trading were unknown. In the State hegemony established by the British, the administration was done by the British administrators, the trading was in the hands of their cousins - the industrialists. The new system of administration based on the will of the people expressed during a general election must be in the closest touch with the needs, desires and the outlook of the masses - who are the voters. They need food, they need clothes, they need shelter, they require more education, higher economic status, and better health. All these require careful planning by the State. The psychology of

the members of the services has to be tuned to this demand. Ordinarily an official plays for safety. If he can avoid taking any step which involves risks, he does so. An administrator has therefore not merely to devise plans of development, but has to secure the proper machinery for giving effect to them. This makes the work much more complex than we can imagine. If a scheme involving expenditure of large sums of money is undertaken, the efforts of all should be to get the earliest consummation of the scheme, so that not only the people get the benefits early, but also in the long run the scheme becomes less costly. This is a point which is ever present in the minds of all producers. The Government which undertakes trading has to follow the methods of the industrialists. I have in my humble way planned and executed many such schemes - though mostly small. They served to impress upon me not only the necessity of careful planning of all the stages of any scheme but the imperative need of reaching the goal 'full steam ahead'. Often I have witnessed the failure of well-planned, useful schemes because those in charge did not realize the truth of the approach mentioned above."

"It is said that the family is the smallest unit of administration; then comes the Corporation and then the State. My experience in civic affairs not only made me more cognizant of the daily needs of the common man, but also gave me the clue to success in a sphere where the smallest needs of one small man in the city have to be adjusted to those of others. It taught me how to satisfy the discordant claims of rival groups of rate-payers in a locality. I learnt then the principles of raising funds by taxation in order to meet the needs of the people, without making it a burden on the people and how a city with all its problems of maintenance of health, provision for drainage have to be administered. Small things give the clues to big ones. State administration has to be fashioned after city governments."¹²⁹

Unlike in the past, when Ministers and officials in West Bengal reached office at 10.30 or 11.00 a.m. and retired for the day at around 4.30 or 5.00 p.m., Dr. Bidhan Roy as Chief Minister would come to office punctually at 8.30 or 9.00 a.m. and retired not before 7.00 or 7.30 p.m. Naturally, other officers and clerks who initially found it difficult to conform to this sort of schedule, eventually fell in. He studied every file himself and never left it to officers to take the final decision in any matter where his decision was needed. He was

129. Thomas, K.P. op cit pp 229-232.

always extra considerate to those who worked with him. He would make enquiries about their family members and whether any one was suffering from illness and would help them to the extent he could with medical advice and also financial support. He was rightly described as sympathy personified.¹³⁰ Before Durga Puja he would present a Dhoti to each one of his bearers. Each one of his personal attendants appeared to be enjoying working with him though they had to work very hard. There was not a single case where any of them even left his service. Even when he was on tour he never forgot to attend to the needs and comforts of the persons who accompanied him. He would always enquire about the health of those around him and would help them with their medical problems.

Dr. Roy was never a mob orator or a demagogue, although he was a front-ranking debater and parliamentarian. He was instinctively shy and withdrawn, but rose to the occasion when he was called upon to address a crowd. Prior to his becoming Chief Minister he avoided mass meetings or mass rallies, even though he was a front ranking leader since 1930. But after he became Chief Minister, political and electoral needs often required him to address mass meetings. His strong points in parliamentary debates were facts, logic and arguments. never playing to the gallery or pandering to emotions. He was his usual self when addressing public meetings. Here again his logical mind, ready wit and capacity not to lose his temper came to his rescue, whether in legislative bodies or in electoral meetings. We have already stressed that he was always free from any personal prejudice, rancour or bitterness against any body. "He realizes every moment that he is the man at the steering wheel and that it is his duty and responsibility to treat all alike, no matter who shouts and who protests."¹³¹ On one occasion, in the West Bengal Assembly, he was looking at his files when a debate on irrigation was in progress. The Leader of the Opposition, Jyoti Basu, suddenly intervened to say tht the Chief Minister was showing utmost indifference to the House, and wondered whether he knew the difference between a 'dam' and a 'barrage'. Dr. Roy, with his attentive ears, caught the point, stood up and quipped "What is Jyoti Basu talking about? A dam is a dam and barrage is a barrage. What is the controversy all about?" He sat down and resumed seeing his files.

130. Reminiscences of S.M. Bose.

131. K.P. Thomas-Dr. B.C. Roy, pages 233-235

He lived a simple spartan life in his Wellington Square home which he purchased from a naval officer in 1915. He had a very methodical and exacting daily routine, getting up at 5.00 AM finishing his morning bath, doing a quick reading of portions from the Gita and the Brahmo Stotram which he kept in his bedroom and was ready for the day by 6.30 AM. His breakfast consisted of coffee, one or two toasts, one egg, some 'Bel' fruit sharbat and fruits like banana or papaya.¹³² He would take the fruit 'Bel' regularly throughout the year for its medicinal properties. After breakfast he would see his patients, ten male and six female patients, on an average every morning. They would be referred to him by other doctors from all parts of the country. He would not charge any fee from them. There were two medical assistants who would write out history sheets of the patients and place them on his table. His diagnosis of a precise ailment that became legendary transcended conventional medical approach and became an intuitive instinct covering other aspects of life and nature. After seeing the patients he would proceed to the Writers' Building for his long day of office work, meetings and some programmes outside. He was usually the first to reach the Secretariat and the last to leave. He would come home in the afternoon for a while to have a light lunch and little rest. His long evenings would generally be spent in the office or home unless he had to go out for some official function or unavoidable party programme. He would generally avoid all dinners etc outside. He would jokingly call 'hospitality' as 'hostility' in the sense that it was harmful to health. From his American doctors he learnt the habit of nibbling his food rather than having heavy meals as such. He would recommend this for people of advanced age. In the late evenings also he would work in his home unless he would receive his close friends, or sometimes visit his brothers, nephews or nieces.

We may quote from the reminiscences¹³³ of Hiranmoy Banerjee I.C.S. "The trait in B.C. Roy which caused us great surprise was his ability to work hard without any limits. When he assumed charge as Premier of West Bengal he was at that time already 65. This is an age when people ordinarily retire from active life. But in his case he accepted the much higher responsibility voluntarily and with the vigour of a young man. A description of his daily routine will itself

132. As recollected by S.M. Bose.

133. Dr. B.C. Roy Birth Centenary Souvenir, Dr. Roy Memorial Committee 1981 pp. 51-61.

indicate how much hard work he put in every day. After getting up early morning he would first have his bath and then see his patients for an hour. Then well before 900 AM he was already in his chamber in Writers' Building. He would start seeing files which had gathered from different departments on the previous evening for his direction. This would continue till about 10.00 AM. Thereafter he would turn to those files which needed discussion with the Secretaries or those where Secretaries had directly asked for his order. Then he would meet people who sought interviews, hear them and take appropriate action. This would go on till 12.00 or 12.30 hrs. Then he would go to the anteroom, have his frugal lunch and take rest for one hour. In his opinion mid-day rest was essential for good health and also added to the working capacity of the person. I distinctly remember once Dr. V.K.R.V. Rao had come to meet Dr. Roy in the Ratendon Road house of his friend Dr. Gangul. Dr. Roy advised Rao about the value of mid-day rest in order to maintain the working capacity intact.

“Work will restart in the afternoon at 2.00 PM. This pattern was changed after he had a heart attack in 1954. Since then he would return home for his lunch and mid-day rest and would return to office at 3.00 PM. He would stay in the office till 6 or 6.30 PM, see files and meet visitors. Thereafter he would return home. When the Assembly was in session there would be some change in his daily programme. As the Assembly met from 3.00 to 7.00 PM he would hold office in his chamber in the Assembly and would attend the session as and when necessary. It will therefore be seen that he would devote at least eight hours daily to his office. There was no departure from it. He was really a workaholic person and could not rest idly except on Sunday. He would attend office in the same way on every other holiday. Whenever necessary the Secretaries would also be summoned. It was in this way that he carried on till he was 80.

I was highly impressed with the strong personality of Dr. Roy. I had never seen any one arguing with him in any manner. Even a Central Minister would not dare to get involved in discussion or debate with him. I have seen many people with strong personalities becoming quite pale in front of Dr. Roy's personality in the same way as an earthen lamp loses its glamour side by side with an electric lamp.”¹³⁴

Banerjee proceeds further to add “He was always sensitive to

134. Ibid.

not hurting the self-respect of senior officials. There could be sensitive officers who would feel hurt if summoned by the Chief Minister through some one else. I have noticed that whenever I was summoned he would invariably get me on the telephone through his Personal Assistant and ask me "Can you please come". He never called me to his room through a third person. He was always attentive to the needs of his personal staff and would make sure that they do not have any discomfort while accompanying him on tours. In his entire period of fourteen years as West Bengal's Chief Minister one cannot perhaps recall a single instance when he was unjust or unkind to an officer, or when he failed to stand by an officer in a clash with a politician where he felt that the politician was wrong and the officer was right.¹³⁵

A point to emphasize is that he always maintained a scrupulous distinction between personal travels where he insisted on meeting all expenses from his personal funds, and government work. He scrupulously avoided passing on his personal expenses to government accounts, a lesson for many other politicians in government positions in subsequent years.

Unlike conditions today, Dr. Roy virtually kept an open house for visitors or patients. There would be hundreds of young people seeking jobs in post-partition economically crippled West Bengal. He would advice them to start small business. Many of them were refugees who asked for resettlement. Dr. Roy would ask them to buy articles from the wholesale market and sell them in the retail market. He would try to help them with small loans from the Refugee Relief Department or the Industries Department, or help them with his own money. Many young people were thus able to do newspaper hawking or start small businesses and make a living on their own.

He also encouraged Bengalee young men to take licence for fair price shops, or go into transport business where taxi and bus permits were liberally issued. Even, at his instance, several cooperative societies of taxi drivers were formed. Special preference was shown to freedom fighters. Thus a first generation entrepreneurship did grow up in West Bengal. Unfortunately, later on many of them succumbed to the temptation of transferring these licences to traditional businessmen on payment of regular monthly fees. Benami transactions became the rule, and the great promise that grew under Bidhan's benign patronage petered out.

135. Ibid.

Dr. Roy's cordial relationship with the civil servants has already been emphasized. He had Sukumar Sen, I.C.S. as the Chief Secretary in his initial years in office, and on his selection as India's first Chief Election Commissioner, chose S.N. Ray, I.C.S. as the Chief Secretary. Ray had a long tenure till 1960. For well over a decade West Bengal was ruled by the Roy-Ray duo. But despite the domination of the Secretariat by a galaxy of ICS officers among whom were R. Gupta, K.K. Hajra, Hiranmoy Banerjee, J.N. Talukdar, K. Sen and H.N. Ray., Dr. Roy usually dictated his own letters, and did not depend on these officers to draft his letters as in the past. He possessed great linguistic skill, sharpened by his long experience as Mayor and Vice-Chancellor. He would take care to study every file and even when drafts came from senior ICS officers, the Premier would make his own additions or modifications. These were more often than not distinct improvements. Incidentally, during his entire period of Chief Ministership he suffered from chronic eye troubles needing surgery on more than one occasion in Vienna or in the USA. In addition to his high-power glasses he would often use a magnifying glass to read files in the Assembly or in the Secretariat. He was not fond of long notes, nor would himself write long ones except on rare occasions. Sometimes he would not even spend time on a full signature, and would just tick-mark a note leaving it for S.K. Chatterjee I.C.S. his Secretary to endorse it stating that the Chief Minister had approved the proposal.

Bidhan always tried his utmost to maintain civil and cordial relationship with political opponents. His personal rapport with Jyoti Basu, who was Leader of the Opposition throughout, and who after many vicissitudes sat on the same chair and crossed Dr. Roy's record by a handsome margin was cordial. At the Assembly and outside they criticized each other politically, but never personally. "How different things were when the Leader of the Opposition would discuss the problem of the State at the house of the Chief Minister over a cup of coffee - the jovial mood of the two was in sharp contrast when one spoke against the other on the floor of the house or at public meetings."¹³⁶ In 1957 Dr. Roy went out of his way to get a bill passed in the Assembly providing for a salary and allowance totalling Rs. 1200 per month to the Leader of the Opposition. Indeed at personal level he treated ruling party and opposition members alike.

136. Chakraborty S-My Years with Dr. B.C. Roy page 246.

On one occasion when he was receiving an application from a lady opposition MLA for a government flat and a Congress MLA who was with him told him after she had left not to entertain such request, his remarks were "Remember, I am the Chief Minister of Bengal and not merely a party leader. I have not made distinction between my party members and opposition members on a matter like this. They come to me because I happen to be the Chief Minister and they have a right to do so" - words which deserve to be quoted for guidance of politicians even today. On another occasion after the leftist Opposition Leader, Jatin Chakraborty had blasted against the Chief Minister in the Assembly, the whole day, he was seen timidly walking into the Chief Minister's office in the evening and Dr. Roy was seen calling Union Labour Minister Gulzarilal Nanda on phone to request him to include this "great Trade Union leader from Bengal to the Indian delegation to the I.L.O. Conference in Geneva."¹³⁷

We have already noted how despite his tough measures against political opponents he was totally free from any personal animosity or bitterness against any of them and would always go out of his way to help them as a Chief Minister or as a doctor. In his reminiscences of Dr. Roy, Shri Jyoti Basu records several instances of how Dr. Roy, as Chief Minister of West Bengal, was particularly responsive to the difficulties faced by Opposition Leaders and their sensitivities and tried his best to solve them. Thus, in 1949 he appreciated the special need of political prisoners and signed an agreement with Communist Leader, Muzaffar Ahmed, giving prisoners, arrested in democratic movements, certain rights and privileges, which were incorporated in the Jail Code. Also, there were several occasions when Dr. B.C. Roy joined hands with the Opposition Leaders to pass unanimous emergency resolutions in the West Bengal Assembly in urgent matters concerning West Bengal. On another occasion he permitted Jyoti Basu to take shelter in the Assembly in the Chamber of the Speaker to avoid arrest by the police during a political movement. Jyoti Basu also recalls the fact that there was a complete absence of bitterness in Dr. Roy after periods of confrontation between the Government and the Opposition. He also recalls how during the war, when some of them approached Dr. Roy to head the Bengal Medical Relief Coordination Committee, he readily agreed

137. Told to author by Shri R.N. Sengupta, the then Deputy Secretary, Home Department.

although this organization had a fair number of non-Congress political leaders including the Communists. “Despite the fact that we were poles apart and the main Opposition coming into conflict with the government, we had not found him wanting in courtesy or moved by any spirit of revenge or bitterness”. Needless to say that whenever irritants such as shadowing of Opposition Leaders by police vehicles or denial of microphones to peaceful meetings organized by the Opposition were brought to the attention of the Chief Minister, he would always go out of his way to remove them.¹³⁸ Even when public feelings against the Communists ran high after China’s border incursion in 1957, and Dr. Roy himself wrote to Delhi wanting the Communist party banned, he allowed Jyoti Basu and other Communist Leaders to hold public meetings and use microphones to express their viewpoint.

Dr. B.C. Roy was always fond of students and would do every thing possible to solve the problems faced by them although some of them were not even known to him, be it in helping them to pay their fees or in helping them to buy their books. The following incident has been recorded by the well-known physician, Dr. Bankim Mukhopadhyaya.¹³⁹ “In 1920 or 1921, when I was a student of Carmichael Medical College, Calcutta, I had no money to buy an essential book called “Practical Anatomy by Cunningham. I, with some friends, went to Dr. Roy’s house and requested for some money to enable him to buy this book without which I would not be allowed to participate in dissection work. Dr. Roy straightaway wrote a slip addressed to a bookshop on production of which the bookshop gave him two volumes of the Book. Later on I came to learn that Dr. Roy had been helping many students like this, sometimes even paying off their school or college fees”. On another occasion some students went to his house and fell at his feet trying to persuade him to exercise his influence to prevent advancing of their college examination by two months, because the Principal of the College wanted to go abroad for six months. Dr. Roy shouted at them saying they should not sacrifice their self-respect by falling on the feet of any one. They should stand up like men and express their grievances. The students went away somewhat disappointed but came to learn

138. Dr. B.C. Roy Birth Centenary Souvenir, Calcutta 1982 pp. 17-21.

139. Dainik Basumati - 1st June 1955, Article entitled “Manush Bidhan Chandra the Man”.

within a short while that the day of the holding of the examination has been shifted back to the original timings.¹⁴⁰ Another student recalls how as a Professor in R.G. Kar Medical College Dr. Roy always took extra care to be familiar with the latest medical journals in the West and the most up-to-date medicines some of which he took special care to import through a particular pharmacy on the Chowringhee and prescribe to his patients. He was a great teacher and made his students actively participate in the classroom teaching process. He also took a lot of interest in the students of the class in helping them with their financial problems.¹⁴¹ In 1949, during a demonstration by the Calcutta University students, he agreed to lift section 144 and all police deployment in return for the students promising that they will not any longer indulge in any violent protests.

P.S. Mathur, Director of Publicity, West Bengal, throughout Dr. Roy's Chief Ministership and his close aide notes,¹⁴² "Nature then was his book, perfection his pursuit, art was his pleasure, work for him at all times was worship. He saw in the present a continuation of the past and a vision of the future and that every day struggle recalled men's first advent on earth, when life was so much attuned to nature and the Creator." He would say: 'We have not yet awakened to the highest aim of life for we are more preoccupied with the task of making a living.' He would often quote Rabindranath Tagore's statement "existence on this planet is concerned with one's wants and needs, while life aims at fulfilment and perfection."¹⁴³

Again in addressing a conference of engineers in 1961 he said, "Some of the tiniest creatures show great skill in making their cells and shelters. We are fascinated by their beauty, their form and strength and utility. There is a lot of science of strategy in the warrens that the humble rabbit builds; we see perfect layout and planning in the anthills and a great deal of organization and systematic town planning - even temperature control - in the beehives. It is the little beavers, perhaps, who made the first artificial reservoir by building dams. For man there have always been so many things to learn from these little creatures,

140. Kundu Ashok Kumar, Dr. Bidhan Roy (in Bengalee), National Book Trust, New Delhi 1988.

141. As told to the author by Maj. General (Retd.) U.P. Mukherjee.

142. Dr. B.C. Roy Birth Centenary Souvenir 1981, pages 75-82.

143. Pages 76-77- Birthday Centenary Souvenir Dr. B.C. Roy.

there has been so much to admire on their creative instinct.” And, he went on to admonish the modern engineer for his familiar failings, “Yet man has been slow in learning from these creative creatures the utilization of locally available materials for construction and adherence to a strict time schedule against heavy odds”.¹⁴⁴

He went on to add, “Man’s own appearance on this planet put him straight into a life-and-death struggle with nature. The story of human civilization is largely the story of what we have built, and our history is written mostly on the fact of such structures. The earliest known relics of the once glorious civilization of Mohenjodaro and Harappa give ample evidence of the existence of a well-developed science of public health engineering, town planning and house building. Later excavations have also revealed what could be described as provisions for irrigation and even control of floods and soil erosion. The fact that our famous temples on the sea beaches are still there bears testimony to the knowledge of the science of tidal waves and oceanology that our ancestors had acquired. To achieve all this required scientific knowledge, and not mere instinct or religious faith as some people are apt to suggest. Their scientific knowledge of soils and weather, geometric patterns and building materials have stood the supreme test of time. Today, unfortunately, we are at a stage when we have lost our link with the past, and we have not yet got a firm grip on the present.”¹⁴⁵

He loved art as much as he loved nature. He was attracted by the nobility of the theme, the majestic scope of the design, the utility of the composition, the simplicity and firmness of the line and the astonishing perfection of the total effect. Architecture, sculpture and painting were fused into a happy harmony through religious piety, he said. The artists brought their faith, their sincerity and their skill to serve their God. Art was an accessory to worship. The greatest sculptures and paintings were all in honour of God. In places of worship man became conscious of the spirit that inspired art and gave dignity and order to their lives. Music, literature, dance and drama, also were intended to purify the body and mind and prepare it for vision

144. Ibid.

145. Ibid.

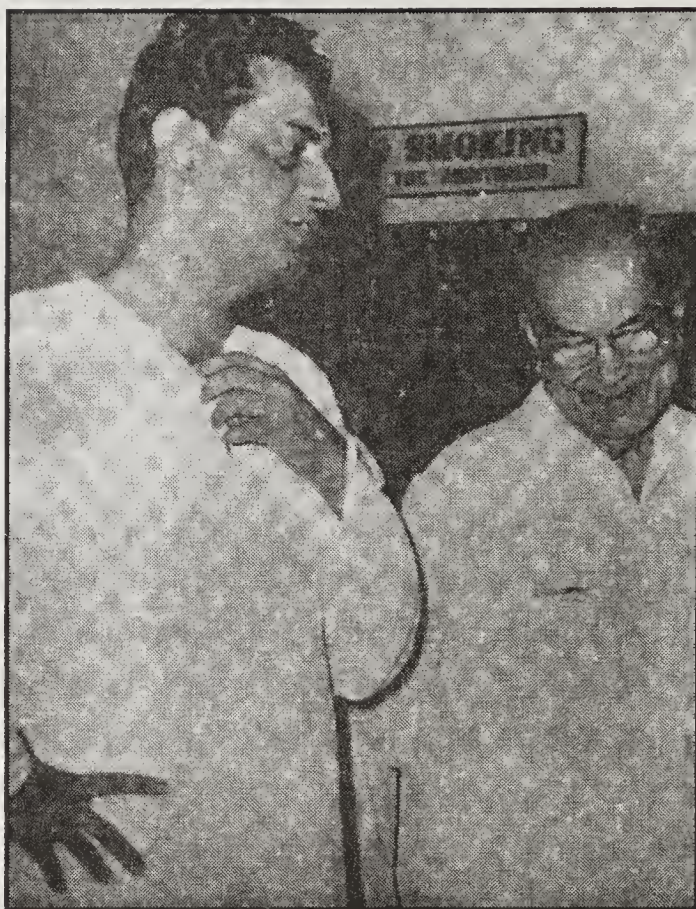
of the eternal. This physician-philosopher politician-humanist was not only an admirer of nature and art, but he was also working to give a practical form to his ideas and sentiments. He once told a music conference: "I am still searching for the music of the soul". It was not only a beautiful expression, it was a sublime thought.¹⁴⁶

When thousands came into West Bengal displaced, distressed and disgraced from Eastern Pakistan, now Bangladesh, and when relief was being rushed to them and camps were being opened for their temporary shelter, it was Dr. Roy who first thought of giving them some sort of "mental rehabilitation" as well. He arranged for musical entertainment at the campsites, and his call brought the assistance of Bengal's two top artists Hemanta Kumar Mukherjee and Utpala Sen, who conducted these programmes. Very soon each camp had its own unit of selected talent, and, of course a set of musical instruments provided by Dr. Roy's Government. This move led to the formation of the Folk Entertainment section of the State Government under Pankaj Kumar Mullick. In due course West Bengal had - and perhaps still has - the largest unit owned by any government - State or Central.

Then, Dr. Roy set up the State Academy of Dance, Drama and Music. It could not be better situated than at Rabindra Bharati at Jorasanko, in the compound of the ancestral home of Rabindranath Tagore. It had its dance section under the great master Uday Shankar and his wife Amala, music department under Ramesh Chandra Banerjee of the famous Dhrupad school of Bengal and drama department under Ahindrea Choudhary, doyen of Bengali stage. This further led to the foundation of the Rabindra Bharati University. It was again Dr. Roy who visualized the need of a National Theatre in Calcutta. It was not only to be an auditorium but also to have a National Theatre Group composed of top artists. He even wanted Sisir Bhaduri to take charge of this unit. This was to become the Rabindra Sadan but without the National Theatre Unit.

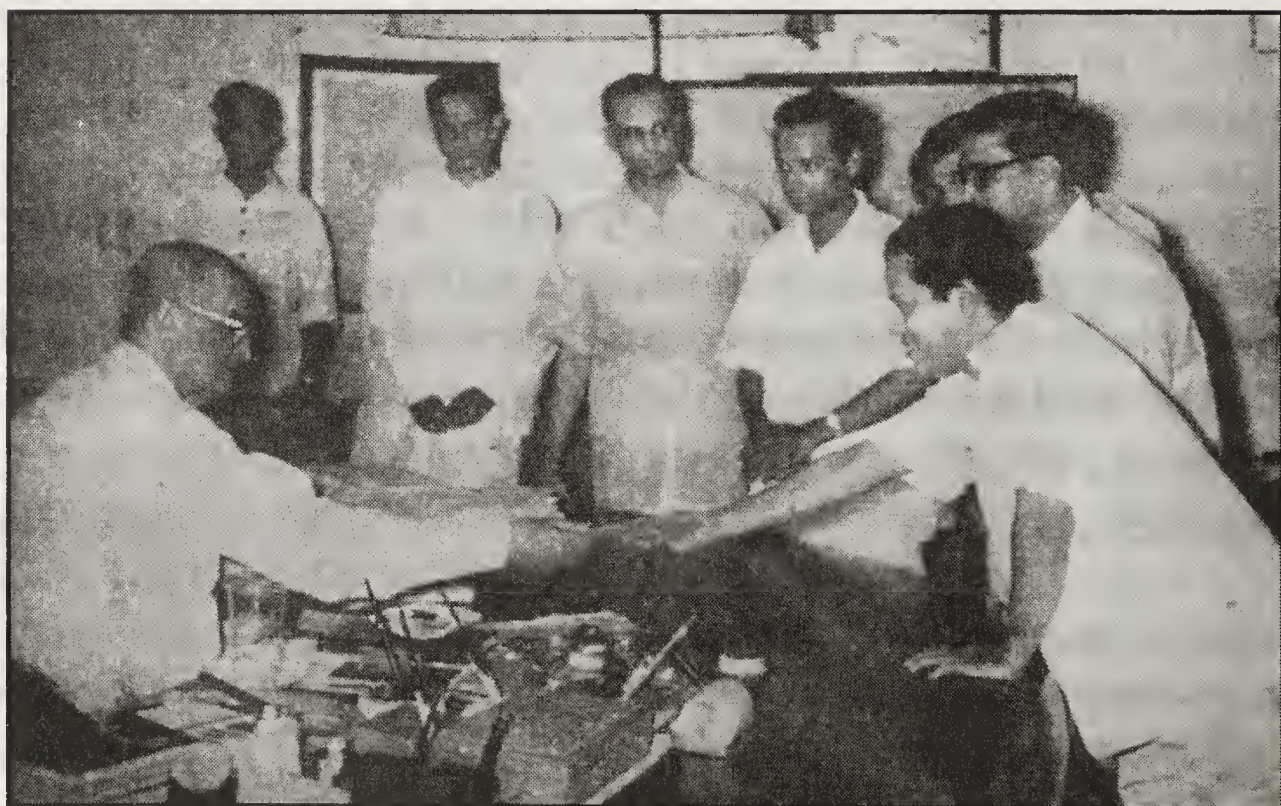
His Government undertook to finance and produce *Pather Panchali* and launch Satyajit Ray on his career as a world-renowned film producer and make *Pather Panchali* one of the best films of all times. It was Dr. Roy's foresight and initiative that gave a new turn to film industry in Bengal and India viz., the making of art film rather than only commercial films.

146. Ibid.



Roy, the 'Maker of Modern Bengal' with Satyajit Ray, the Director of Pather Panchali, the path-breaking Indian film.

When he used to visit Nepal for professional consultations or Darjeeling officially it was also a holiday for him. He used to watch



The author with Dr. B.C. Roy (Group Photo)

the mountain ranges in his spare time, study flowers and rocks, brooks and springs and always wished he was still young to take to mountaineering. When the news of the conquest of the Everest by Tenzing and Hillary was broken to him, his immediate reaction was “Tenzing should have a school of his own where he could teach others how to climb mountains. Soon enough we should be able to send an all Indian team to the top of the Everest and all the peaks we know of. We want a thousand Tenzings in India.” That was the genesis of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute at Darjeeling, which is now the pride of the country. At Darjeeling he also set up the Himalayan Zoo and the rich orchid collection. He also developed the medicinal plant cultivation at Mongpu and had many more plans to make people take interest in nature and the mountains.

Colour and form of flowers fascinated Dr. Roy. ‘Say it with flowers’ was an expression he almost translated into action. Truck loads of flowers used to be presented to him on his birthday and all these were sent to hospital wards, the distribution being supervised by Dr. Roy himself. He had vases of beautiful flowers on his office desk and pots of annuals and exotic foliage in the foyer of Writers’ Buildings. The Secretariat roof garden received his personal attention. A serpentine bed at the Calcutta Information Centre was outlined on the ground by him during a visit.

Sudhir Mahdavi Bose who faithfully served Dr. Roy as his Deputy Secretary for nearly the entire length of time, records many anecdotes about how Dr. Roy was extra attentive to the comfort and facilities of those who worked closely with him and showed his affection even to their family members. Also, how in his daily examination of 16 patients, he not only showed his great medical skill and his proverbial insight and intuition but also showed concern for their financial conditions and their household needs. There are innumerable examples of his near miraculous power of correct diagnosis and helping his patients to recover fully. When an indigent patient died Dr. Roy would even take the trouble to arrange his or her funeral at his own expense and by himself.

Dr. Roy would go out of his way to help any one in distress. He never thought of the consequences but stood firm like a rock

and withstood any kind of attack. When it was the question of medical aid he would not brook any delay but took immediate steps. On one occasion an officer was explaining certain matters to him and the Chief Minister was listening with rapt attention all the time looking at the drawings kept on the table. As he raised his head to make a query and saw the officer's face he said in a loud voice, "Go away, go to P.G. Hospital immediately". The officer could not make out anything, but left quietly with the files he had brought with him. Dr. Roy immediately summoned his orderly and asked him to call back the officer, who returned with fear writ large on his face. Dr. Roy wrote out something on a piece of paper and gave it to him saying, "Give this to Nripen (Col. N.C. Chatterjee, Superintendent of P.C. Hospital)." He also enquired if the officer had a transport to rush to the hospital. All these happened within minutes. Among those present in the room were S.N. Ray, Chief Secretary, Binoy Dasgupta, Finance Secretary and Sudhanshu Banerjee, Financial Adviser to Chief Minister. Asked by them why he sent the officer so abruptly to hospital, Dr. Roy smiled and said, "I noticed a very serious type of infection developing on his upper lip which has started swelling. The poor fellow had come with a file to explain certain plans to me without knowing that his entire face would soon swell and endanger his life. I have sent him to PG. Hope he will get well." Saying this he spoke to Col. Chatterjee over phone and told him about the case. Those present were deeply touched by Roy's innate feelings for others, especially in distress.¹⁴⁷.

Dr. Roy stood head and shoulders above most other politicians of his times. His career as a physician and other qualities as a leader in other spheres i.e. political, social, academic and administrative made Dr. Roy what he was for over four decades. Dr. Roy was endowed with some inherent qualities of head and heart which endowed him with the capacity to judge a person's calibre. He could easily understand how a person could be utilized best. Once he had selected a person for a specific responsibility his method was to give him a free hand but keep a watch on his activities. Any one who received his trust would normally receive hundred percent of it.

147. M. Bose's reminiscence.

There are many stories current about his legendary skill of diagnosis and treatment as a physician. What is much less known is the fact that he kept regular contacts with his patients be it Mahatma Gandhi or Motilal Nehru or very ordinary persons. According to the reminiscence of one of them, his grandfather Satikanta Guha was a well-known judge who donated most of his savings to a surgical hospital. There was a function in Raj Bhawan in Calcutta where these donations were to be accepted. Dr. Roy presided over the function and the then Governor of Bengal was the guest of honour. In his address Dr. Roy mentioned that although he normally did not attend such functions of charity, in this case he agreed to preside over the function as whatever was donated by Guha came from his honest earnings.¹⁴⁸

He was very fond of music, specially the spiritual type and very often sent for well-known exponents of Rabindra Sangeet like Pankaj Mallik or Santosh Sengupta to give performances. He would remember by heart many of the songs. He became very close to Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore not only as a doctor, but also as an admirer of his creative abilities. One can always recall the address he delivered at the Town Hall of Calcutta as the City's Mayor on 27 December 1931 on the occasion of the 70th birthday of Gurudev. He declared that "although the poet belongs to the whole world, he specially belongs to the city of Calcutta", and that he along with the whole of Bengal rejoiced in his glory. In his reply the poet said, "This Municipal Corporation makes the city of my birth blessed in comfort, recovery and self-respect. Let its patronage of painting, sculpture, music and arts flourish. Let this great city get rid of the ignominy of illiteracy and its dirt. Let health come to the people. Let food come to their homes. Let enthusiasm come to their minds and let them all be engaged in the city's welfare. Let not this city be polluted by the scourge of fraternal conflict or mutual violence. Let goodwill influence every community and every religious group to unite and maintain peace and harmony in this city. This is my prayer."¹⁴⁹

148. Reminiscence submitted by Hirak Kumar Guha, a doctor of 170/40, Lake Garden, Calcutta.

149. Sudhir Madhab Bose's reminiscence.

Whenever the poet felt ill, it was to Bidhan Chandra that he turned for his treatment and recovery in the same way as nearly all luminaries of that age - C.R. Das, Gandhiji, Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Netaji Subhas, Dr. Rajendra Prasad or Sardar Patel- turned to him.

Dr. Roy also maintained warm personal relations with Netaji Subhas. On the day he took over as Chief Minister, 23 January 1948, he paid a tribute to Netaji by saying that Subhash was a man of history and that the way he united so many people of different kinds in his Azad Hind Fauj, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians for the common cause of India's freedom, would always inspire the people of India and that India would never forget his mantra 'Jai Hind'. As a doctor he also kept up good personal equation with the Muslim League leader of undivided Bengal with whom he did not see eye to eye in politics as also with the Governor and top British officials.

Amidst all his success and all his activities he remained a deeply God-fearing person and would never miss his daily prayers. The following incident is recorded by one of his associates.¹⁵⁰

In the course of a journey in 1956 to the Botanical Garden, Shibpur, accompanied by the two distinguished visitors from the Soviet Union, Bulganin and Khrushchev, Dr. Roy was comparing the scenic beauty of Calcutta city from the river with the corresponding river views of London, New York and Hamburg etc. Khrushchev said "Why are you only illustrating from western capitals like England, America and Germany? Why are you not describing similar scenic charms from a socialist country?" Dr. Roy laughingly retorted "How can I do so when I have not visited any socialist country?" Khrushchev said "I am straightaway inviting you to the Soviet Union as state guest. You visit whatever part of the USSR you would like to visit and stay as long as you wish to." Dr. Roy replied, "Your invitation has come rather late. Had it come 5-10 years ago I would have gone, but at this stage how can I visit your Godless country? If I die there what will happen?" Khrushchev gleefully said, "We will arrange a state funeral for you accompanied by a funeral march by the Red Army". Dr. Roy retorted, "You see I am

150. Dr. B.C. Roy Birth Centenary Souvenir, Dr. Roy Memorial Committee, 1981.

from a very spiritual country. I do not have much fondness for a state funeral etc. I do not wish to die in a Godless country.” Then Khrushchev asked “You are such a famous doctor, such a famous scientist. How can you believe in a superstition like God?” Dr. Roy answered with a light smile, “Of course I believe strongly in God”. Khrushchev pursued and said “Have you directly seen God?” Dr. Roy answered “No”. Khrushchev then said “With scientific attitude how can you believe in these things?” Dr. Roy’s retort was “You are also a scientist, have you seen electricity?” Khrushchev replied, “See that electric motor is running, you can feel its heat”. Dr. Roy reminded him, “In Physics it is separate from electricity.” Khrushchev pointed to an electric light by the side of the river and said “This light is also burning because of electricity. It is an applied use of electricity.” Dr. Roy said with a grin, “In that case please try to understand that just as you are believing in electricity on account of its applied expression, we also believe in God on account of his applied impact.” Khrushchev said “Give me two hours time, I shall convince you that there is nothing like God.” Dr. Roy smilingly retorted “I don’t need two hours. I can convince you in one hour that there is God.” Khrushchev was so much influenced by Dr. Roy’s personality that he offered to gift an Ilyushin aeroplane to Dr. Roy. Dr. Roy said “If I have to accept a gift from you, I would much rather accept some advanced medical equipments so that our medical students can learn properly. I have gone beyond the age when I can play with an aeroplane.” Khrushchev did send some equipment which were kept in Dr. Roy Memorial Postgraduate Medical Institute of Calcutta University.

Thus, in understanding the man Bidhan Chandra Roy, we have finally to remember that he was a deeply religious person, not in the conventional sense, but in the philosophical sense. From his early childhood he inherited from his father the virtue of daily prayer. He did not care for any ritual or outward show of religious practices. For him religion consisted of an abiding faith in an impersonal God, daily reading of the Gita and the Upanishad hymns in the Brahma Stotrum and acquiring a state of mind that was unruffled in all circumstance. If ever there was living embodiment of a *Sthitaprajna Purusha* (detached and realized man) who was not disturbed in

sorrow, nor over-elated in happiness, who neither welcomed nor spurned anything that came his way, who was without any sense of deep attachment, fear and anger and whose entire life was dedicated to the welfare of the people it was Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy.

Birthday Musings

I have often myself reflected on the significance of the tributes paid to me on my birthday. I have wondered if they are paid to me in such profusion merely because I happen to be the Chief Minister of this State. Or should they be regarded as tokens of the public's sincere sentiments towards me, representing their appreciation of my services, however humble, to my country and my people. If I took them as mere formalities, like so many other formalities, connected with the office of the Chief Minister and required by convention to be paid to him, I would not attach much value or importance to them; I would then only accept them formally, without much emotion. But from the way they are paid to me and the way people behave towards me, I get the impression that they are not just such conventional gestures. I believe they reveal the people's, at least of a large section of the people's, affection towards me, their trust in me.

Believing this as I do, these birthday tributes are to me matters of great gratification and significance. They affect me deeply and in various ways. They remind me emphatically of my great responsibilities, of my obligations and duties to the people. This has the effect of goading me to work harder and harder, of urging me to devote all my energies, all my faculties to the great tasks we have set ourselves to accomplish, the tasks of freeing our country from the pressure of poverty and ignorance. They induce in me, at the same time, a sense of deep humility and a feeling of awkwardness. For when I see the problems and difficulties ahead of us, I cannot but be acutely conscious of my very limited capacities with which I have to face and tackle them. I then suffer from an uncomfortable feeling that I am not equal to the tasks, that people have put exaggerated faith in my abilities, that I have been assumed to have qualities which I do not really possess, or possess in a very limited capacity. I have no doubt that my services

in the past are also given undue importance; my personal contributions as public worker are rated too high.

When we are fond of a person, when we love him and trust him, we are prone to over-estimate his abilities. I flatter myself that the people in general, for similar reasons, have too high an opinion of my personal abilities and attainments. This, as I have just said, gives rise to doubts whether it is for the right reasons that I have been chosen to be one of the national leaders, whether I have the right qualities to be one. But, then, whenever I have been assailed by such doubts, I have received strength and courage from the consideration that nothing is perhaps more essential for me to accomplish the type of work entrusted to me than to have the confidence and love of the people. And these I appear to enjoy, and so long as I continue to enjoy them, I need not let such doubts worry me. For the choice of serving the people hardly rests with me; I have been given this unique opportunity and I must do my very best. This is what I have resolved to do and have been doing. I am sure, with your co-operation and best wishes, we are advancing steadily in the right direction, and no obstacles, however formidable they may appear to us at the beginning, can stop our progress if we work hard with all sincerity and devotion.

Although I have for many many years been taking part in public activities, I have never had any aspiration for power or position in the sphere of public affairs, or, for that matter, in any other sphere. I am not an ambitious person. If I have some position of importance in public life that is not because I made any efforts to gain it; nor is that because I have got any superior virtues or outstanding abilities. I wonder how I have come to have it! Why should I have been chosen for so responsible an office! During my school days and early age, I did not show any promise of ever achieving eminence in any field; nor did I have any such secret longing. I was not born with any special gifts and was in every respect a very ordinary student. I did not work hard at school, did not mind, like so many other boys, playing truant occasionally, never expected to do well at examinations, and was quite happy when I just passed in one. Nobody thought I was in any way a talented boy. As we

know, there have been men who, from their very early age, sensed that they were destined to achieve something important, to become somebody great- a leader of a people, a great reformer, a creative writer, an artist or a scientist. I have never felt any such sense of destiny. Even my becoming a doctor was not the result, as I have heard being said, of any long-cherished desire on my part to enter the medical profession in order to be able to serve my suffering countrymen. As a matter of fact, when, on getting my B.A. degree, I had to choose a professional career, I had only a vague notion, as so many young men have these days, that I would rather be a doctor or an engineer. Beyond that I had no other aspirations at that time. And I went in for medicine, and not engineering, merely because the offer to get me admitted to the Calcutta Medical College reached me earlier than the other offer to get me admitted for training in engineering.

It was, however, very fortunate, some people may even say 'providential', that I entered the medical profession. For it was when I started practising that I first came in direct contact with the real sufferings of our people, their poverty and their want. I was profoundly moved by what I saw, and thus the supreme necessity of helping and guiding them was brought home to me. I felt an intense urge, an inner compulsion to do everything in my power to help them, to fight for them, to devote my life to their service. This has ever since been the central purpose, the guiding passion of my life.

It is this that brought me into public life, and then gradually and inevitably, into politics, which, as such, has no attraction for me.

I believe sincerely that in all my public actions I have always been true to this central idea. I have been driven to work keeping this aim in view. In the course of my rather long life, I have taken part in many spheres and fields of public activities. I have worked and fought for various movements, causes and undertakings. Sometimes I have played a very humble role, at other times rather an important one; but whatever the work that has been my share to do, I have always tried to do it with the best of my ability. I derive great satisfaction from this. When I was a student at the Calcutta Medical College, there was a board there, bearing the adage; "Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might." This principle tallied with my outlook and

temperament completely. I have ever since tried to put this into practice in my own life, along with another maxim: "Do not put off till tomorrow what you can do today." When a job, whether it is generally regarded as important or not, falls to my lot to do or is assigned to me, it assumes importance immediately so far as I am concerned; and I cannot rest till it is complete. I believe that such services as I have succeeded in rendering to the nation and such as have received the appreciation of the people are due mainly to this attitude and outlook of mine with regard to work.

I invite you all to resolve today to bear in mind constantly these two maxims and put them into effect in your own lives. A resolution like this would be the most valuable gift ever presented to me on my birthday. If we all do that we will bring about a revolution in our society and we will move fast and smoothly towards the great goals we are aiming to reach.

I am deeply thankful that I am well enough again to meet you today and work among you. During my recent illness, the doctors who attended me feared that I would never get back my previous strength, and that I might have to retire from public life altogether. At first, like others, I also lost faith in the possibility of my complete recovery; and I felt utterly depressed, thinking that I would prefer death to the agony of having to live a life of forced inactivity. I must have been in this state of hopelessness for a few days before it occurred to me that as long as my services were necessary, the Almighty will keep me alive and active, and I need have no fear. Thus, I regained faith, and, as soon as I was on my way to recovery, I resumed work with courage. I knew my doctors were not happy about this. They were surprised that, even though I was a doctor myself, I did not sufficiently realize the seriousness and gravity of the risks I was running in not taking enough rest. They thought I was being unreasonable and stubborn. But I looked at the situation from a different angle. I took it that, in response to my prayer, I was granted a new lease of life to devote it entirely to the service of my country, and I regarded it as my duty not to while away, if possible, a single day of it. I must do my utmost, I felt, to make the best use of the remaining few years of my life, and it was not for me to worry about such consequences as I would as a mere physician. I would also request you not to worry about my health.

In every advanced religion of the world, serving one's fellow-beings is regarded as a supreme task, a sacred duty; and I consider it to be what may be called my personal religion. Such work is an absolute necessity of my being. Whether I work through the Government, as I am doing now, or from outside, whether through this organization or that, the fact is that I am wedded to the public life of this country. I have most of my life been deeply engaged in the affairs and service of the people, and it is in public activity, in public life that I have found the joy of living, the reason for my existence. It is mostly in this sphere that the things I really take an interest in are located. I would not say that I have sacrificed anything in adopting this way of life for if I had to forgo something in the material and personal sphere, that has been more than compensated by spiritual gains.

I am not a political philosopher. I do not know what is democracy or what is socialism. I am interested only in knowing how we can serve our people better and more efficiently. If I joined the Congress Party and have worked through it, that is because it grew out of and symbolized the collective desire of millions of our countrymen to serve our country. It is through such an organization, they found, that the country could be best served. So, it is but natural that I joined the Congress Party. If I thought that I would be able to work more effectively through some other organization, I would certainly do so. I do not ask anybody to come forward and work through any particular party or organization. Your conscience would be the best judge as to whether what you do is for the good of the country and the people in general or it serves some narrow and selfish ends. If we follow the verdict of our conscience, if we listen to her judgements and direct our activities accordingly, we are not likely to stray from the path of truth. We have only to be sincere to ourselves and work hard.

We Bengalis are, on the whole, an emotional people. When I say this I mean that in our individual as well as collective life we are inclined to be guided more by emotions and feelings than by rational thinking. Because of this trait in our character, we have certain fine qualities, certain virtues, of which we may well be proud. But we

also suffer, because of this, from certain disadvantages and weaknesses, particularly when, in this troubled age, we find ourselves amid the grim struggle for existence.

When something - a cause, a movement or an incident - appeals to our heart, when something moves our feeling, we are capable of performing for it, if so necessary, acts of great sacrifice and bravery. That no doubt is the reason why, during the prolonged struggle of our country for political independence from foreign subjugation, thousands among us responded so promptly to the call of the nation, and did not hesitate to make the supreme sacrifice. It may not be an exaggeration to say that it is mainly from Bengal that the patriotic fervour of *Bande Mataram*, spread to the rest of India. Then, if our language and literature are so advanced, if we are so responsive to the arts and they have so important a place in our life, that also, I think, is due to this emotional bent in our character.

We are going through hard times, struggling for our very existence. The problems and difficulties we are facing are huge and baffling. In a situation like this, mere feeling for our suffering compatriots, however genuine and profound, and emotional enthusiasm to do something great for them, cannot be relied upon to guide us. It is absolutely essential, in such circumstances, to meet the situation calmly and try to understand it in all its aspects. We have to study our problems and difficulties in a scientific manner, from all possible angles, and then proceed to make plans and schemes for their solution. If we are too ambitious and forget what is practicable, if in our over-zealousness we try to achieve all at once, we are likely to experience great disappointments and feel frustrated. Therefore, we must look out carefully before we leap. We must be objective in our approach. We must not let ourselves be swayed by emotions.

But I do not say that emotions and feelings have no place here. On the other hand, they have a very important role to play in our struggle for progress and prosperity. For it is from them that the inspired urge to act should come. Unless we are deeply moved by what we see, unless we feel the sufferings others undergo, we can never have that urge to work for the greater good of all. This is not the time to think only of our per-

sonal success, of our individual well-being only of this group or that. We must do our very best for the whole nation and the community, devote all our powers to the service of the people. Nothing less than that is demanded of us all, and let us respond to the call wholeheartedly. On us depends the entire future of the new Bengal, which has been so hard hit recently and is now struggling to recover its previous position of leading our whole country again. We must not forget for a moment that what status in the whole of India we are going to attain in the very near future will be the result of what we are doing today. We have the ability and if, with faith in our future, we exert ourselves with determination, nothing, I am sure, no obstacles, however formidable or insurmountable they may appear at present, can stop our progress. Our future is bright and we have no cause to despair, if we all work unitedly keeping our vision clear and have a firm grasp of our problems.

We have been hearing of late quite a good deal about the necessity of 'peaceful coexistence' in the field of international relations. This phrase may be new, but the principle, the motto it stands for—live and let live—has been preached by the wise men of all ages, in our country and elsewhere. We cannot pretend though that, at any time in the past, this sane counsel received much recognition in the realm of international affairs. However, as a result of certain scientific discoveries, together with the gradual development of some political, economic and social factors, mankind as a whole now finds itself in a critical situation. The very existence of the human race is threatened if the various peoples and nations, particularly the big powers, with their different political systems, their diverse and conflicting aspirations and interests, do not learn to live together in peace and in harmony. The spread of the movement for 'peaceful coexistence' indicates that the gravity of the situation is being realized by more and more people. There is no doubt that those who control the big powers are already alive to the fact that in their hands lies the future of mankind. Our country is of course doing its best to support the growth and spread of this spirit of 'peaceful coexistence', deeply inspired as our foreign policy is, by Mahatma Gandhi's ideals of peace and non-violence.

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Dr B.C. Roy has been one of the foremost national leaders of the 20th century. A legendary physician of the country, a distinguished political leader, philanthropist, educationist and social worker, he was one of the longest serving Chief Ministers of West Bengal and is rightly hailed as the 'Maker of Modern West Bengal'.

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